

Update

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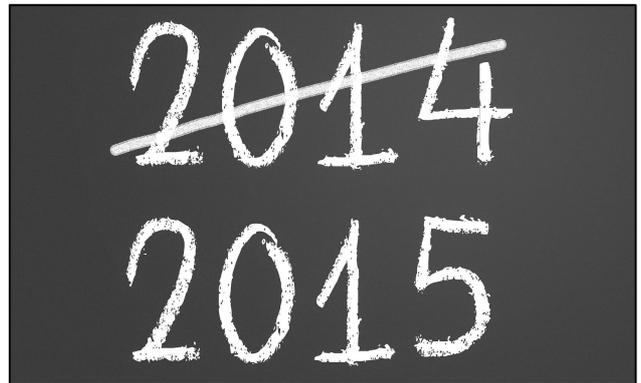
THE CHIEF'S BRIEF

By Danny Moody, Chief Executive, Northants CALC

Welcome to the first edition of *Update* for 2015. Although for many it has already faded from the memory, I hope you had a good festive break and I wish you well for the year ahead.

2015 promises to be another monumental year in local government. There is of course the small matter of the local and general election on 7 May 2015 and who knows what difference that will make to the local government landscape?

Nationally, we know that the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) has been significantly reduced and re-organised and that its Secretary of State has had a huge personal influence on the department. A new government could cut the department's funding even further, or we could see renewed investment and purpose. If Eric Pickles remains at the helm of DCLG post-election then it might be business as



usual, but if he is replaced, either as a result of a reshuffle or because there is a different party in power, then there could be significant changes that impact parish and town councils.

Locally, there are district/borough council elections and parish/town council elections across the county, except for a few parish/town councils in the district of Daventry that are on a different electoral cycle. It promises to be a very interesting and exciting election because the anecdotal evidence is that a significant number of councillors will not be standing for re-election. Never before has it been so important to attract a new crop of councillors into the sector so your recruitment machine should be in top gear by now!

Change is part of life in local government and parish and town councils seem to have an enormous capacity to absorb it. A good parish council is adaptable, flexible and fleet of foot. It tends to operate in quite a short timeframe, responding to local need on an ad hoc basis. That means it can adapt to change and reinvent itself as required, anchored always by the underlying core purpose of serving its community. District and borough councils, who are neither small enough to be

local nor big enough to be strategic, face a very uncertain time, but for parish and town councils their purpose is absolutely clear: remain rooted in the community, serving the needs of local people. Parish councils are parochial. After all that is, by definition, their job.

There is change everywhere we look. Smaller councils (those with a turnover of less than £25,000) will be covered by a new Transparency Code which is advisory at the moment but will be made mandatory by regulation soon. It will have the effect of pulling back the curtains on the parish sector and letting the light flood in. For those councils that have their houses in order already it will be easy to meet the new requirements. For others it could be like getting a call from friends saying they are passing by and would like to drop in to say hello... it might be necessary to scurry around straightening cushions and putting washing-up in the dishwasher before they arrive!

There will be major developments on the planning front too. There are several parish councils in the county that are nearing the end of the Neighbourhood Plan process and are likely to have their plan adopted this year. In addition, the West Northamptonshire Joint Core Strategy passed inspection late last year and has

now been adopted. Work will begin in earnest to develop site-specific plans for all villages and towns in Daventry, South Northants and Northampton. On the other side of the county a consultation has just begun on the Pre-Submission North Northamptonshire Joint Core Strategy so parish and town councils in Wellingborough, Kettering, Corby and East Northamptonshire will want to feed in their thoughts on that (consultation closes on 9 March 2015).



And as if there wasn't enough on the local government plate, Northamptonshire County Council (NCC) has announced a proposal to cut its staff from over 4,000 to just 150 by outsourcing its functions and becoming a commissioner of services rather than a direct provider. There's more about this proposal below.

In December I had the pleasure of visiting several parish councils. One such visit was to Brixworth Parish Council in Daventry district where we spent an evening looking at the Code of Conduct and the ethical framework within which the council operates. I would urge all councils to set aside some time that is not a formal council meeting to discuss and debate how the council could and should develop. I'm not suggesting "away days" or "blue sky thinking", but if your council team only ever gets together at council meetings then you are missing an opportunity to become more effective and purposeful. If your council would like a facilitated workshop just get in touch with Anne Kirkland (akirkland@northantscalc.gov.uk) who will give you the costs and details.

In mid-January I attended a meeting of the Superfast Northamptonshire Project Board. More and more households and businesses in the county now have superfast broadband available to them as a result of NCC's partnership with BT and the county is one of the most advanced in Britain in its roll-out of Fibre To The Cabinet (FTTC) broadband. Of course there is much more to do yet, and it is a very frustrating wait for some, but plans are on track and progress is good. If you would like to know more about Superfast Northamptonshire and what the plans are for your community please visit www.superfastnorthamptonshire.net.

At the end of January I attended two days of meetings in London. The first was a meeting of the 7th May Group, which is an informal grouping of six progressive County Associations of Local Councils (CALCs) who share ideas, materials and resources. Working together means that each CALC can deliver better value for money to the member councils in its area. The second meeting was the County Officers' Forum (COF), which is for the chief officers of all thirty eight CALCs in England, with the CEO of the National Association of Local Councils (NALC) and representatives from DCLG in attendance. COF discusses topical issues and it is always interesting to hear about different approaches to common issues. At this meeting the DCLG representative said "*You're going to see [DCLG Officials] all over the country banging on about how good parishes are*", which is certainly a refreshingly positive stance and bodes well for the future!

2015 is going to be quite a year. It could be a great year for parish and town councils.

Please do continue to get in touch with your queries and questions. That's what we're here for!

AT LAST, THE E-AGENDA

Another piece of antiquated local government legislation has been overhauled. The Local Government Act 1972 Schedule 12, para 10(2) required the proper officer of the council to send to each member of the council or committee (and by good practice sub-committees) a summons to attend meetings of the parish council or the committee at least three clear days before the meeting. The summons had to be “*left at or sent by post to the member’s usual place of residence*”. This meant that sending the agenda as an e-mail attachment was not strictly within the letter of the law and so some clerks dutifully walked (or drove) round their councillors posting hard copies through letter boxes.

Now, the Local Government (Electronic Communications) (England) Order 2015 has made it lawful to deliver the summons electronically, subject to the consent of the member. The new provisions are in force from 30 January 2015.

In addition, summonses issued by the clerk need no longer be signed personally by the clerk but can be authenticated in a different way e.g. by a facsimile signature printed, stamped or electronically generated.

The new arrangements do not avoid the need for a paper notice to be given to the public (on noticeboards) nor do they allow for the posting of members' summonses on the council website alone. There is still an element of personal service on the member albeit electronic.



**Digital by Default
Service Standard**

Services so good that people prefer to use them

It is suggested that consent can be given by a short form to be signed by the member - the forthcoming elections and the making of the declaration of acceptance of office gives clerks the obvious opportunity to obtain the consent of all members to the change. An example form of consent will be made available to all member councils, should they wish to engage in electronic communications.

A full copy of the Order can be accessed at:

http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukxi/2015/5/pdfs/ukxi_20150005_en.pdf

IT'S A DATE!

With 2015 being an election year we expect the usual flurry of enquiries at Northants CALC to do with the timing of the Annual Meeting of the council. To pre-empt this I thought it might be useful to set out the key facts and to illustrate why confusion normally reigns!

Schedule 12, para 7(2) of the Local Government Act 1972 provides that *"In a year which is a year of ordinary elections of parish councillors, the annual meeting of a parish council shall be held on, or within fourteen days after, the day on which the councillors elected at that election take office, and in any other year the annual meeting shall be held on such day in May as the parish council may determine."*

So that's crystal clear then isn't it? Well no, because it depends on the meaning of the word "days"! In some parts of LGA 1972 "days" means "calendar days" and in other parts "days" excludes Saturdays or Sundays (or both) as well as public and bank holidays.

Section 16(3) of the 1972 Act provides that *"the whole number of parish councillors shall retire together in every ordinary year of election of such councillors on the fourth day after the ordinary day of election of such councillors, and the newly elected councillors shall come into office on the day on which their predecessors retire."* The date of the election is Thursday 7 May 2015, so the fourth day after the ordinary day of election would be Monday 11 May 2015 (if "days" means "calendar days"), Tuesday 12 May 2015 if one excludes Saturdays, and Wednesday 13 May 2015 if one excludes Saturdays and Sundays.

Given that it is quite an important date, when one set of councillors cease to be members and a new set of councillors become members, one could be forgiven for thinking that the law would be very clear about the precise calculation of "days". But it is not.

The difficulty is compounded by the fact that Schedule 12, para 7(2) of the Act requires that we count forward (fourteen days) from the date that the new councillors come into office. Because we are not certain of the original date, neither can we be certain when the fourteen days starts and finishes.

The way for this to be clarified once and for all would be for a council to be challenged in the High Court and for a judge to provide a case-law ruling. Thankfully (or unfortunately depending on your point of view) in forty three years this has never happened.

The National Association of Local Councils (NALC) takes the view that Sundays should not be counted in the calculation of “days” but Saturdays should, which gives a date for commencement of office of Tuesday 12 May 2015. Other legal commentators in the sector take the view that because the law is otherwise silent the meaning of “days” must be “calendar days”, which gives a date for commencement of office of Monday 11 May 2015.

Applying the same principles in counting forward fourteen days we arrive at Thursday 28 May 2015 using NALC’s method, or Monday 25 May 2015 using the calendar-days method.

Councils whose normal schedule of meetings results in the May 2015 meeting falling between 12 May 2015 and 25 May 2015 inclusive are safe, but outside those dates it is a slightly grey area.

But hang on a minute, there’s another complication. What about the service of a summons to attend the meeting? How can you have a meeting on the day that new councillors take up office, since you won’t have been able to serve a summons on them to attend!

There are two schools of thought. One is that you should count forward three clear days from the day on which councillors come in to office to allow for service of summons. For example, if we assume that councillors come in to office on Monday 11 May 2015 then we serve the summons that day for a meeting three clear days later on Friday 15 May 2015. The other school of thought is that because Schedule 12, para 7(2) provides for a meeting to be held “***on**, or within fourteen days after, the day on which the councillors elected at that election take office*” it must therefore have been the intention of the legislators to suspend the need for a councillor to be summonsed with three clear days’ notice to their first meeting.

Again, it is a technical, pedantic point that has never had its day in court and consequently remains a grey area.

Applying the most restrictive interpretations together would result in a window for the Annual Meeting of Friday 15 May to Monday 25 May 2015 inclusive; applying the most relaxed interpretations results in a window of Monday 11 May to Thursday 28 May 2015.

It's a matter of risk assessment. A council may be challenged on a decision that it had made on the basis that the decision was procedurally unlawful because it was made at the Annual Meeting of the council which had been convened on a date that was not compliant with LGA 1972. That particular challenge hasn't arisen in forty three years, and even if it did arise the impact would likely be quite small.

Suffice it to say that the world will keep turning, despite the Local Government Act 1972!

KNOWING YOUR DUTIES UNDER THE RRO

Article by Kris King at Hartwell Safety Services

Since the introduction of the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005 the fire brigade have stopped visiting sites to issue fire certificates. The emphasis has now been passed over to the 'responsible person' (owner or occupier) of any non-domestic premises to ensure the safety of all staff and visitors. If your council has a non-domestic premises (village hall or office) you are responsible for its fire safety.

If you are the responsible person, a good place to start is by carrying out a fire risk assessment and if you have 5 or more staff the fire risk assessment must be documented. By identifying fire risks and people at risk you can devise a plan to reduce or remove these risks. This risk assessment will highlight what your premises needs to do to be compliant. A fire risk assessment should be carried out regularly as buildings, contents, usage and regulations are constantly changing.

Things to consider when carrying out an assessment are: - emergency routes and exits, fire detection and warning



systems, firefighting equipment, the removal or safe storage of dangerous substances, an emergency fire evacuation plan, the needs of vulnerable people (elderly, young children or those with disabilities), providing information to employees and other people on the premises and staff fire safety training.

Your building should have fire extinguishers to cover all relevant risks. If your building is open to members of the public it should also have a fire alarm and emergency lights. Once you have these in place it is important to have them serviced regularly to ensure compliance with the relevant British Standards. Fire alarms should be serviced every six months. Extinguishers and emergency lights should be tested once a year.

Portable electrical appliances (anything with a plug) should also be tested annually to safeguard users.

How we can help? Hartwell Safety Services are based in Northamptonshire and provide fire risk assessments. We also service fire alarms, fire extinguishers, emergency lights and carry out portable appliance testing. We currently provide our services to a number of local councils in Northamptonshire. You can find further information on our website www.hartwellsafety.com or alternatively if you would like to discuss your requirements Hartwell Safety services can be contacted on 01604 315279 or 07531 755522 for advice and no-obligation quotes.

BIODIVERSITY DUTY

All parish and town councils have a legal duty to consider how to conserve biodiversity in all their actions. Under Section 40 of the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006 public authorities should consider how wildlife or land may be affected in all the decisions that they make.

They should particularly consider this when:

- making planning decisions about development and land use
- developing new infrastructure such as roads, buildings or flood defences
- managing public space, nature reserves or civic buildings
- promoting the local area to visitors or investors
- deciding how to deal with waste and pollution

- making decisions about energy and water use
- sourcing wood or plant products

For example, if a parish council planned to install a new play area on a piece of open space it should consider the effect of that on biodiversity.

The Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) has published a new guide to the Biodiversity Duty that sets out when wildlife or land may be affected, how public authorities can show regard for biodiversity, and how to measure commitment to the biodiversity duty.

The guide is available online at:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-biodiversity-duty-for-public-authorities/the-biodiversity-duty-for-public-authorities>

PUBLIC WORKS LOANS BOARD

All parish and town councils are permitted to borrow capital finance, subject to obtaining borrowing approval from the Secretary of State. In Northamptonshire since 2001 thirty eight councils have borrowed £4 million pounds for capital projects ranging from the purchase of land, to replacement of street lights and construction of new community buildings.

Once borrowing approval is obtained a parish or town council can go to any source to borrow the money, but by far the most common source is the Public Works Loan Board (PWLB). Moneys are provided by Act of Parliament, drawn from the National Loans Fund and rates of interest are determined by the Treasury.

The PWLB's accounts are audited by the Comptroller and Auditor General whose reports on them are laid before Parliament. Interest rates and borrowing terms are typically more favourable than those available on the high street.



St Luke's Primary School was converted to a community centre by Duston Parish Council with the help of a PWLB loan.

The Government has recently tabled an amendment to the Infrastructure Bill which would enable the Government to abolish the PWLB and transfer its lending functions to another body using the process set out in the Public Bodies Act 2011. The Government plans to set out its proposals on transferring the lending functions to another body in a consultation document, in due course.

Nikki Sarton from the Local Government Finance - Capital Finance and Reserves Team at DCLG said *“We are aware that most parish and town councils that undertake borrowing, obtain loans from the PWLB, and we wanted to reassure you that this reform is about governance only; i.e. it is a machinery of Government change. The proposals will have no impact on existing loans held by local councils, nor will they alter the policy or procedures for any future loans.”*

If your council has a capital project in mind don't just “save up” for it by squirrelling away precept each year. It is better to borrow the money, deliver the project and then use the precept to pay off the loan over the lifetime of the new asset (or sooner if affordable). That way the service/facility/asset is available now and the people that use it or benefit from it are the ones that are paying for it.

Borrowing approval applications are administered by the County Association, so if you would like to find out more about borrowing please contact dmoody@northantscalc.gov.uk.

SEEN BUT NOT HEARD?

More than one clerk has asked *“Am I allowed to say anything at a council meeting”*. The answer is yes! In fact, that's what the clerk is there for! Here we take a look at the status and role of a parish clerk when attending parish council meetings.

The clerk is the Proper Officer of the council, often the Responsible Finance Officer and always the Head of Paid Service, even if they are the only employee! Their status, technically, is akin to that of the Chief Executive of a district or county council.

The clerk is the custodian of the council's information, and they are advisor to the council on matters of law, procedure, health and safety, and finance. How then can a clerk not be permitted to contribute at meetings!

The critical thing is that the input from the clerk should be professional, never personal. The clerk is an impartial, objective officer whose personal views, beliefs and opinions should not be voiced during a council meeting, but that doesn't mean that their professional views and opinions should not be voiced.

A chairman once said "*Our clerk is not entitled to have an opinion*". Well, if the opinion is that the council is about to make an unlawful decision that exposes the electorate to the risk of financial loss then it is absolutely essential that the clerk has an opinion!! But it is a professional opinion, not a personal one.

Good clerks consider carefully and predict what information the council will require during a meeting and will take steps to gather it in advance. The information is presented to the council in a paper, a report or in clerk's notes. During debate the clerk's role is to provide additional verbal information where and when required and to ensure that the council's decision making is lawful, appropriate and clear.

Good councils treat their clerks as independent, objective officers whose professional opinion is trusted, valued and routinely sought during meetings.

PLANNING BASICS

The planning system in England can be fairly complex but the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) has attempted to simplify it in a new plain English guide. The guide explains how the planning system in England works but it is intended to give an overview only and does not set new planning policy or guidance. Paragraph 1 of the guide contains the somewhat amusing caveat: "*We have done our best to ensure that the information in this guide is correct as of January 2015. It is possible that some of the information is oversimplified, or may become inaccurate over time, for example because of changes to the law.*"

The guide provides a brief explanation of Local Plans, Neighbourhood planning, contributions and community benefits, planning enforcement and permitted development rights. It is essential reading for any parish councillor engaged in making planning-related decisions.

Download the guide at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/plain-english-guide-to-the-planning-system>

COUNTDOWN TO ELECTIONS

With the current wintery weather a late spring day seems a long way off but Election Day on 7 May 2015 is not far away. And at the time of writing there are sixty nine days (that's calendar days by the way!) until the close of nominations on 9 April 2015. Only sixty nine days to recruit sufficient candidates to ensure that your council has a contested election.



For all the background on the elections and how to promote and encourage candidacy see the November/December *Update* at:

<http://www.northantscalc.gov.uk/uploads/ncalc-eupdate-nov-2014.pdf>

A page has been set up on the Northants GALC web site to gather all your election materials. Look there first for suitable text for your web sites, newsletters and noticeboards: <http://www.northantscalc.com/elections.html>.

Please send copies of any materials you develop to info@northantscalc.gov.uk and they can be added to the resource for others to use.

A MAJOR RETHINK

Northamptonshire County Council (NCC) has published a proposal to move away from direct delivery of services to a 'Next Generation' model where a far smaller organisation would remain to commission other new organisations to deliver services instead. The plan would see NCC shrink from over 4,000 employees to around 150.

Services currently run directly by the council would leave its direct control and become separate stand-alone organisations free to compete with others for council contracts to deliver those services designed to achieve the twin aims of safeguarding the council's most vulnerable and creating greater wellbeing in the county.

Leader of the council Cllr Jim Harker said: "*The traditional model for the council and local service delivery is unsustainable. Quite simply it can no longer work and is outdated. The method of largely paying for local services through government*

grant no longer stacks up and in Northamptonshire our demand is far outstripping our income as we continue to play our part in tackling the national deficit.”

The proposal is included in the Draft Budget and Council Plan, which was out for consultation between 9 Dec 2014 and 20 Jan 2015. The Council Plan is presented as one of 37 lengthy documents on the council’s Committee Management Information System in a file called “20141209_Item06_APPENDIX_A_CouncilPlanRefresh2015” ([download](#)).

Northants CALC’s response to the consultation said *“It is doubtful that an ordinary member of the public has been able to engage with the consultation, which is regrettable on a proposal of this magnitude”*. And that the consultation period *“will have been insufficient time for the majority of our member parish and town councils to respond to the consultation within their normal schedule of meetings”*.



Jim Harker: “The traditional model for the council and local service delivery is unsustainable”

Substantively the response says that *“The board’s main concern was that of accountability. As members of a local authority, the county councillors provide a point of contact and accountability between electors and the authority. Under the proposed model the county councillors will have very little say in how services are delivered (because that will be specified in a detailed contract and service level agreement) nor will they have direct contact with the staff providing the services or, more particularly, the managers of those staff. Even now, it is very difficult to hold a county councillor to account for services received through LGSS because “that’s LGSS, not NCC”. The board would like to see detailed proposals for how democracy and accountability would be protected in the new model.*

“...the board understands the need for the radical redesign of NCC’s services but feels that much more detail is required and that there should be much more opportunity for debate before NCC makes any binding decisions.”

The Draft Budget and Council Plan will be discussed by NCC at its meeting on 19 February 2015.

CO-OPTIONS

The law provides that a parish or town council must co-opt to fill a casual vacancy as soon as reasonably practicable, unless the vacancy arises within six months of an ordinary election, in which case the council may co-opt to fill the vacancy but may also leave the vacancy open until the election.

Filling casual vacancies by co-option in the six months before an election is often worthwhile because it gives the newly co-opted councillor an opportunity to dip their toe in the water to see if they like it!

DON'T BE A NUMPTY – STAY SAFE THIS WINTER!

Northamptonshire County Council's Emergency Planning team has launched the latest in its series of popular animated videos to raise awareness of reducing unnecessary deaths this winter.

The Don't Be A Numpty campaign uses the videos to offer people advice on staying safe in a range of emergency situations from flooding to heatwaves. With winter underway, the council's Emergency Planning team has launched its next video to advise people on how to look after themselves during cold weather and extreme conditions.

The advice includes making sure drivers clear their windscreen of ice before setting off and wearing appropriate footwear in snow or icy weather.

Cllr André González de Savage, county council cabinet member for strategic infrastructure, economic growth and public protection, said: "This video is a fun way to get across some serious messages about winter safety, from wearing appropriate clothing for keeping warm, to safe driving tips. Excess winter deaths contribute to 1 in 20 of all deaths each year, so it's vital that people take steps to look after themselves during the cold winter months."

In 2012/13, more than 7,000 people were admitted to hospital in the UK as a result of falling over on snow or ice.

The Emergency Planning team has the following advice for staying safe this winter:

- Make sure your car windscreen is clear of snow and ice before setting off on your journey
- Pack an emergency kit in your car including a torch, warm clothes and a flask of hot drink in case you become stranded
- Never venture out on to icy ponds, no matter how solid the ice looks
- Check on elderly and vulnerable neighbours to make sure they are warm and safe
- Wear warm layers of clothing and shoes or boots with a good grip
- Use a fireguard and have your chimney swept regularly if you have an open fire
- Keep candles and a torch with spare batteries in easy reach in case of power cuts
- Get regular winter weather alerts to make sure you're prepared by following [@NorthantsEPTeam](#)

For more advice and to view the Don't Be A Numpty winter video, visit www.northamptonshire.gov.uk/emergencies

Information for elderly people about keeping warm this winter is also available from www.ageuk.org.uk

UNITS OF MEASUREMENT – GARDENING ALLOTMENTS

The British Weights and Measures Association (BWMA), one of whose patrons is Kettering MP Philip Hollobone, campaigns for the retention of imperial weights and measures, such as feet and inches, pounds and ounces, and the mile. Included in this is traditional units used for the measurement of allotments, such as rods and poles.

The aptly named John Gardner, Director of BWMA, sent a letter to all county associations, which is reproduced here in full:

"It has come to our notice that a Mr David Johnson is emailing parish and other councils across the country, stating that they are "breaking the law" by using rods and poles to describe allotments. Mr Johnson starts his emails under the Freedom of Information Act, asking for allotment prices, then switches context and uses the deadlines under the FOI Act to pursue a change to metric.

Mr Johnson's correspondence, which is available to view online does not disclose that he is not a local resident, or that he is an activist who has written to over 150 councils. Some councils have removed rods and poles to meet the Freedom of Information Act deadlines which, of course, have no bearing on the matter.

We are writing to point out that no UK legislation has been passed to prohibit the rod or pole or any other traditional unit in relation to allotments. When drafting metric regulations in the mid-1990s, the government specifically exempted "transactions by specification", of which allotment contracts are an example.

The metric regulations to which David Johnson refers are the Units of Measurement Regulations 1994, aimed at sellers of "loose goods" such as greengrocers and confectioners. Loose goods are goods that have no pre-set quantity, but are weighed out or measured at the point-of-sale.



The renting of allotments does not fall into the category of loose goods. An allotment holder does not say, for example, "Can I have an extra half-metre, please", and for the council to roll out a little more allotment. Allotments are let as plots, to which metric regulations do not apply.

Rods and poles and perches have been used in Britain for hundreds of years. Many people enjoy these historic measurements and cannot be compelled to abandon them without an Act of Parliament, which must be debated and voted upon.

At the current time, no such Act exists, and the government has no intention of proposing one. According to the Department for Communities and Local Government (letter, 15 May 2014):

"As responsibility for the provision and management of allotments rests with the local council, it is entirely a matter for them should they choose to change how their sites are measured".

For further information please contact BWMA direct: M: 07986 007994 ~ www.bwmaOnline.com ~ Email: bwma@email.com.

A CAUTIONARY TALE

When the Localism Act 2011 created the criminal offence of failure to declare a Disclosable Pecuniary Interest (DPI) it was only a matter of time before an elected member found themselves before the beak.

Former Dorset County Council leader and East Dorset District Council member Cllr Spencer Flower is the unfortunate trailblazer. His trial will be at Bournemouth Magistrates' Court in March.

Cllr Flower faces charges of failing to comply with the Localism Act by failing to disclose interests in Zebra Property Solutions Ltd and Synergy Housing and by participating and voting in meetings. Cllr Flower has pleaded not guilty to all charges. He resigned from his position as leader of Dorset County Council but remains a county councillor and an East Dorset district councillor.

S137 LIMIT FOR 2015/16

The Section 137 limit for 2015/16 is **£7.36 per elector** (up from £7.20 for 2014/15).

S137 of Local Government Act 1972, sometimes known as “the free resource” gives parish or town councils the power to spend money on anything that it doesn't have another power to do. It is limited to an amount per elector and the expenditure must benefit some or all of the residents of the area.

NEIGHBOURHOOD PLANNING SUPPORT

The Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) has announced that there will be a new programme for supporting neighbourhood planning starting in 2015. Although not formally launched yet the intention is:

- All groups demonstrating a need for grant support will be eligible to apply for up to £8,000.
- Some groups facing more complex issues will be eligible to apply for a further £6,000 in grant and specific packages of direct support where needed. (These groups are likely to include those in high growth areas, deprived areas, business areas, areas over 25,000 population or clusters of

parishes, neighbourhood forums, or groups preparing neighbourhood development orders).

- An advice service and a range of online resources will provide detailed technical support.
- There will also be grants and support for groups wanting to prepare a Community Right to Build Order for a specific development (or alternatively, a community-led planning application for a housing development, where eligible).

For more details please see:

<http://mycommunityrights.org.uk/neighbourhood-planning>

LGPS CONTRIBUTIONS

For those councils using the Local Government Pension Scheme (LGPS) for their staff please be aware that from April 2014, part-time members' contributions rates are on actual pensionable pay rather than the full time equivalent. For details please see <http://www.lgps.org.uk/lge/aio/17364789>.

If the wrong basis has been used during the year it should be rectified in the next payroll run.

To find out more about the county Pensions Service please see:

<http://pensions.northamptonshire.gov.uk>.

KNOW YOUR LATIN

Quorum - the minimum number of members of a deliberative assembly necessary to conduct the business of that group. The quorum for parish and town councils is three or a third, whichever is greater.

Ultra vires - meaning "beyond the powers". If an act requires legal authority and it is done without such authority, it is ultra vires. A parish council that has acted ultra vires has acted outside its powers.

Sui Generis - meaning "of its own kind/genus" and hence "unique in its characteristics". Used in planning it is a use class for development that doesn't fit neatly in another use class.

TRAINING AND DEVELOPMENT FOR LOCAL COUNCILS

Look below for a course or event that may be of interest and make a booking through the Clerk to the Council. All councils must have a training budget from which councillors can book courses under the authority of the Clerk.

Training Opportunities February – April 2015

Preparing for Year End Audit (Litchborough)

Mon, 09 Feb 2015 7:00pm

This interactive session will cover what you need to do to prepare for your Year End Audit (Internal & External) and will give you an opportunity to ask any questions you may have.

Preparing for Year End Audit (Higham Ferrers)

Tue, 17 Feb 2015 10:00am

As above.

Digital By Default Crash Course

Wed, 18 Feb 2015 10:30am

This Free Of Charge 'practical how to guide' will give you insight on how to; Enhance Your Council's Reputation, Improve Communications and Save Staff Time. Best practice case studies will showcase how other councils have become more efficient and effective by adopting 'digital by default'. All councils will benefit from attending this course no matter what stage of maturity your website is currently at or even if you don't have one.

Off to a Flying Start

Sat, 28 Feb 2015 10:00am

This course is designed to help all Clerks and Councillors make an early, effective and confident start to their careers, by providing quality, constructive and participative training on the roles and responsibilities of Clerks and Councillors.

An Introduction to Rights of Way and the Definitive Map

Wed, 15 Apr 2015 10:00am

This short course is intended for clerks, parish councillors and parish path wardens who want to learn more about the origins of the public rights of way network in Northamptonshire and their role as public custodians.

New Clerks (Day 1 of 2)

Sat, 18 Apr 2015 10:00am

This course provides a broad understanding of the role and responsibilities of a town or parish clerk. This course is a must for newly-appointed clerks, or clerks who feel they could benefit from some formal training.

CiLCA 2015 (COURSE NOW FULLY BOOKED)

Tue, 21 Apr 2015 10:00am

This is the accredited certificate for the Local Council Sector, designed to test basic levels of competence for the role of parish clerk. The syllabus has been designed to cover all aspects of the clerk's role and candidates are required to compile a portfolio of evidence to show they fully understand their job.

New Clerks (Day 2 of 2)

Sat, 25 Apr 2015 10:00am

As above.

Openness & Accountability – Should Parish Councils Bother?

Tue, 28 Apr 2015 10:00am

This course will cut through the confusion and provide delegates with a clear, concise explanation of the openness agenda and then illustrate what practical (and actually relatively simple) steps a council can take to ensure full compliance whilst avoiding the common pitfalls.

For information on any of these courses please see

www.northantscalc.gov.uk/events.html or for further information contact Anne Kirkland, Training Manager, on 01327 831482 or akirkland@northantscalc.gov.uk. All courses must be accompanied by a course booking form, which can be downloaded from www.northantscalc.gov.uk.

You can also book online at <http://www.northantscalc.gov.uk/training-reservations.html>.

If you would be interested in a training session specifically designed and delivered for your Council, please contact Anne Kirkland to discuss your requirements.

SITUATIONS VACANT

Sibbertoft Parish Council

Name of Council	Sibbertoft Parish Council
Job Title	Parish Clerk
Vacancy Statement	Sibbertoft Parish Council has a vacancy for a parish clerk and responsible finance officer.
Requirements	Applications are invited from suitably qualified and experienced persons, although training will be offered and enthusiasm to learn will be seen as an alternative to formal qualifications. The parish clerk will be responsible for the administration of the business and finances of the council. He or she must be computer literate, with good communication skills. Friendly and positive outlooks are essential.
Salary	Salary will be commensurate with experience
Hours	25 hours per month.
Place of work	Work from home.
Please apply in writing to:-	
Contact	Chris Dickinson
Position	Chairman, Sibbertoft Parish Council
Address	53 Welland Rise Sibbertoft Nr Market Harborough Northamptonshire LE16 9UD
Telephone	01858 880617
Closing date for applications:	1 March 2015

Glenfield Parish Council (Leicestershire)

Appointment of a Full Time Parish Manager, Proper Officer and Responsible Financial Officer to the Council. This is a recently re-evaluated role and a great opportunity. The applicant has the potential to develop the job as Glenfield expands.

Salary from £34,768 to £37,398 according to experience but within Glenfield Parish Council pay scales. For full details please see www.glenfieldparishcouncil.org.uk, or contact the Parish Manager on 0116 2312498. Closing date for applications: 16 February 2015.

Braybrooke Parish Council

Name of Council	Braybrooke Parish Council
Job Title	Parish Clerk
Vacancy Statement	Braybrooke Parish Council has a vacancy for a Parish Clerk and Responsible Finance Officer.
Requirements	<p>Applications are invited from suitably qualified and experienced persons. The parish clerk will be responsible for the administration of the business and finances of the council.</p> <p>The post includes some evening work. The successful applicant would be expected to have CiLCA (Certificate in Local Council Administration). He or she must be computer literate, with good communication skills. Friendly and positive outlook is essential.</p>
Salary	Salary scale LC1, SCP 15 – 17, £16,054 - £16,830 pa. pro rata.
Hours	Initially 12 hours per month.
Place of work	Work from home.
Please apply by email with CV and references to:-	
Contact	Mrs D Berry JP
Position	Chair, Braybrooke Parish Council
Email	chairman@braybrooke-pc.uk
Address	Griffin House Braybrooke Market Harborough LE16 8LW
Telephone	01858 461551
Closing date for applications:	20 February 2015.
Notes for applicants	<p>See job description on www.braybrooke-pc.uk.</p> <p>Although applications are to be made by email, supporting papers may be submitted either by email or by post if more convenient.</p> <p>Two referees will be required but references will not be taken up until after interview.</p> <p>Those shortlisted will be invited to an evening interview on a mutually convenient date preferably w/c 2 March.</p>

To find out about the role of the Clerk download an introductory booklet entitled “*The Essential Clerk*” at:

<http://www.northantscalc.gov.uk/uploads/essentialclerk.pdf>

NORTHANTS CALC CONTACTS

Danny Moody	Chief Executive dmoody@northantscalc.gov.uk
Anne Kirkland	Training Manager akirkland@northantscalc.gov.uk
Linda Bain	Administration Manager lbain@northantscalc.gov.uk
General	info@northantscalc.gov.uk
Member Enquiry Service	mes@northantscalc.gov.uk

Address:

Northamptonshire County Association of Local Councils
6 Litchborough Business Park
Northampton Road
Litchborough
Northamptonshire
NN12 8JB

Telephone: 01327 831482



www.northantscalc.gov.uk

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