

Update

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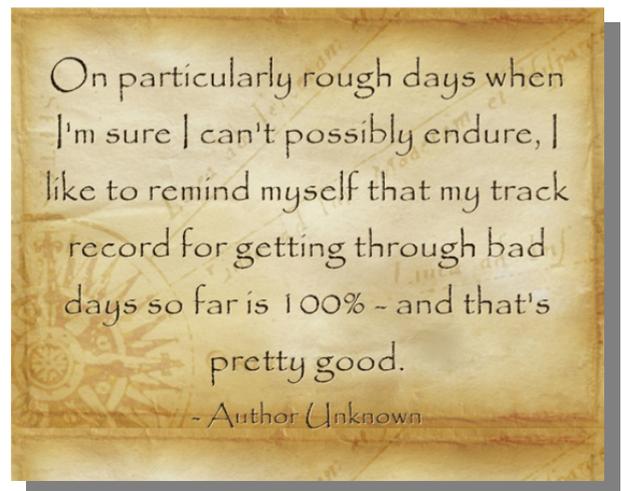
THE CHIEF'S BRIEF

By Danny Moody, Chief Executive, Northants CALC

It's been a tough and challenging time for many parish and town councils in Northamptonshire. The parish elections in May normally cause a bit of a ripple but this time round it was more like a surf wave. A small number of councils had no change of councillors at the election but many changed a quarter, a half or even the whole of the councillors. There was even a council where the clerk resigned just before the election and there were no candidates for election; that made for an interesting Annual Meeting! Where a significant number of councillors are new it means that the council team has to build all over again. Whereas before the election the team may have been stable for a number of years now there are fresh faces, with fresh ideas. The new team has to go through the process of storming and forming before a new norm can be established.

Fresh ideas and enthusiasm are of course vital ingredients of a proactive council but new councillors don't always have the knowledge to put their ideas forward in a way that is appropriate for local government. There is an article below that looks at various types of councillor and how best to integrate them into the team.

There has been a dizzying turnover of clerks too in the last few months. Northants CALC has advertised no less than 31 vacancies in 2015 alone. That's one in seven councils changing clerk. There is no single reason but there are a number of common threads: There was the clerk that had been in the sector for a long time and took the opportunity provided by the elections to hang up their boots. There was the clerk who was waiting to see what happened at the election and made their decision to stay or go depending on whether or not a particular member of the public was elected, or indeed whether or not a particular councillor was re-elected. And then there was the clerk who decided that all the new rules and regs (as they saw it) made the job less attractive than it once was. None of these reasons are particularly new but I think that this year all three factors conspired to create a bigger turnover than usual. I predict it will slow down over



the next six months, although there are still four or five vacancies in the pipeline to come.

New councillors and new clerks take time to find their feet and to learn the potential and the constraints of the parish council world. It is a time for proceeding methodically and purposefully, making sure to consolidate wins and to analyse (and learn from) losses. The storming and forming stage of team building is necessary and it can be productive. It provides an opportunity for the council to take a step back, to reflect on its *raison d'être*, to reaffirm its aims and objectives and then to move forward anew once everyone is on the same page.

And don't forget that Rome was not built in a day. It may take the council a whole year to go through the process of reflection and renewal but it is better to take that time now and complete the process rather than leaving problems festering away in the background. Help is at hand too. Northants CALC can assist any member council in its rebuilding phase and support is available from principle councils too. New councillors and new clerks will be on a steep learning curve but should always feel they are supported in their development and that there is a wealth of training and learning opportunities available to them.

It's been a busy time at Northants CALC over the last couple of months too. We've been short-staffed because Anne Kirkland, our Training Manager, was on sick leave for six weeks but she has now returned to work and is fighting fit. Also, I am proud to report that Anne has successfully completed the selection process to be a Justice of the Peace and she will be sworn-in at the beginning of December, so many congratulations Anne! Linda Bain and I battled on heroically in Anne's absence and although it was not always possible to answer the telephone as quickly as we normally do I think we managed to keep all the plates spinning without any major breakages!

Our training programme continued unabated and we delivered sessions on the new openness and transparency regulations, how to be a good employer, chairmanship, and our core skills course "Off to a Flying Start" for the new intake of councillors. Our training events have been really well supported so thank you for all the bookings and please do keep them coming.

I have also delivered several whole-council development sessions, where we take the training to the council. I enjoy these evenings immensely and it is always

impressive to see the dedication and enthusiasm of councillors and clerks. As well as the development sessions I have attended council meetings across the county from Abthorpe in the south to Stanion in the north and six other councils in between. It is resource intensive to visit individual councils but it is extremely beneficial to the Association for me to know what's happening at the coal face as it enables me to design our service to suit current needs. One thing that I know from these visits is that councils are extremely busy at the moment, with very full agendas and very important business to transact. Anyone who thinks that parish and town councils don't do much has never been to a meeting of a parish or town council!

I've attended two county conferences recently to represent parish councils. The first was organised by the



Northamptonshire Enterprise Partnership (NEP) and focused on the rural economy and how various stakeholders can work together to improve the social and economic wellbeing of the county. Northamptonshire is generally affluent but this can hide pockets of deprivation and social isolation even in the most active villages. The second conference, "Healthy Communities, Healthy Future" was organised by Voluntary Impact Northamptonshire (VIN) with key speakers from



the private, public and voluntary sectors. At both conferences I made the point that parish and town councils may not deliver economic or health improvements directly but often facilitate the activities of

others. A good example is rural broadband where some parish councils have led the charge and have worked with Superfast Northamptonshire (or directly with telecom suppliers) to hasten the provision of fibre broadband in their communities. This then enables business growth (how many businesses now operate from back bedrooms?!) and may facilitate health developments such as doctor's consultations from home via video link. Our Northamptonshire Larger Councils Partnership (NLCP) meeting at the start of July also focused on what parish and town councils can do to promote economic development and some really interesting ideas were generated. Expect to see much more on this over the coming year. A parish or town council is a community-level, public-sector local authority that can act as the interface between strategic public-sector bodies (borough/district/county councils, police, fire, NHS) and the voluntary and

community sector. And with 262 civil parishes across Northamptonshire that's quite a resource!

In June and July I attended the Kettering Rural Forum and the South Northants Clerks' Forum, both of which are meetings organised by the principle council to bring together the parish and town councils to share ideas and talk about issues affecting the borough or district. Similar forums are held across the county and they are a great opportunity to improve communications between the tiers of local government. The critical thing is that the parish and town councils take ownership of the forums and set the agendas, otherwise they become "talking at" rather than "talking with" sessions.

In mid-June we convened the very first meeting of our new Local Council Award Scheme (LCAS) Accreditation Panel and I am really delighted to congratulate Higham Ferrers Town Council on becoming the first council in Northamptonshire to achieve the Quality standard under LCAS. There are three levels: Foundation, Quality and Quality Gold and it would be great to think that over the next four years every single council is at least at Foundation level (standard practice) with many moving on to Quality (good practice) and Quality Gold (best practice). If you would like to know more about the Local Council Award Scheme please contact Anne Kirkland at akirkland@northantscalc.com.

Northants CALC is very conscious that in order to keep up with all that's going on, and to best serve the needs of member councils, it has to work on its own development too. So on 2 July we held the very first Chairman's Day where the board of directors and honorary officers got together to talk about how the Association might develop over the next five to ten years. This was not an away-day "jolly" (it was organised at minimal cost) but a really focused and productive session that will assist in developing the strategy of the Association as we meet the ever-growing demands and needs of member councils. The Association has a very efficient and effective governance structure now and is proud to be considered amongst the leading CALCs in the country. Now we have the challenge of maintaining that position and we know that if we stand still we will be going backwards. And to quote the erstwhile clerk of Titchmarsh Parish Council "Going backwards is not the way forward"!

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

SIMPLY THE BEST

Weedon Bec near Daventry has gained the prestigious title of 2015 Northamptonshire Best Village, with Syresham the runner up. The winners were announced at a presentation ceremony held on 14 July at the Hunsbury Hill Centre in Northampton. David Laing, H.M. Lord-Lieutenant of Northamptonshire and President of Northamptonshire ACRE presented delegates from the winning villages with cups and certificates. The Competition celebrates community spirit and the quality of life in the county's villages. The full results were:

	Winner	Runner Up	Third / Highly Commended
Overall	Weedon Bec	Syresham	Rothersthorpe
Small Villages	Rothersthorpe	Lois Weedon & Weston	Moreton Pinkney
Medium Villages	Syresham	Flore	Cottingham
Large Villages	Weedon Bec	Stanwick	Blisworth and Mawsley



John Wilshire & Sue Butler receiving the Winner's Cup from David Laing, HM Lord-Lieutenant & President of Northamptonshire ACRE

Last year's overall winner was Helmdon who were therefore ineligible to enter this year's competition. Moreton Pinkney won the Newcomers Cup.

The Best Village Competition is run entirely by local volunteers and is based at Northamptonshire ACRE. The competition looks at all aspects of village life: community and social activities, sustainability, the provision for the younger and more senior residents, the village website, local business involvement as well as tidiness and the welcome visitors receive. The competition is sponsored by Hollowell's Funeral Plans whose generous support since 2010 has ensured that villages continue to be provided with the opportunity to enter this important Northamptonshire annual contest. For further information regarding the competition in Northamptonshire, please contact Barron Walton on 01327 312950 or via email at Barron.Walton@northantsacre.co.uk or David Scudamore on 01604 762230.

FINAL NOTICE

Northants CALC has completed the web and email address change from northantscalc.gov.uk to northantscalc.com. The reason behind the change, which was beyond our control, was explained in the March *eUpdate*. The old system has now been switched off so any mail sent to @northantscalc.gov.uk will either disappear into the ether or will bounce back to sender. Notice of the change has been on every e-mail sent out from Northants CALC since the end of March. If you haven't already done so please update your contacts and delete all references to northantscalc.gov.uk. We have discovered some e-mails that were not received here because the sender used an old e-mail to reply to or hadn't updated their address book in Outlook or Windows Mail.

Please make absolutely sure you are sending to the correct address. All staff contact details are on the back page of this newsletter.

HOW TO MAKE BETTER DECISIONS

The Abilene Paradox (search it on Wikipedia) describes a situation where a group of people collectively decide on a course of action that is counter to the preferences of many (or all) of the individuals in the group.

Have you ever been in a situation where your parish or town council made a decision that seemed crazy or counter-intuitive to you and that later appeared to have little or no support from other councillors? Maybe it was the Abilene Paradox at work, or maybe your council has suffered from one of the other effects that get in the way of making good decisions.

In his blog "*5 Ways To Produce Better Ideas At Meetings*", Ben Nesvig observes that "*The average intelligence of individuals at meetings is overrated. Even a group of brilliant people can collectively produce a lemon of an idea at meetings.*" He adds "*In meetings, what's far more important than the intelligence of individuals is the collective intelligence of the group. Individual intelligence matters but not as much as cohesion and the ability of the group to work together.*"

So how can parish and town councils make better decisions when they must, by law, make those decisions at meetings? Here is a quick run down of the 5 ways:

1. Give everyone the opportunity to contribute

“the largest determinant of group intelligence is the equality of conversational turn taking. No matter how smart they are, if one or two people dominate the conversation, the group intelligence will suffer. In highly intelligent teams, ideas and discussion take place among a group of people, not just individuals.”

So straight away we can see that the councillor who always speaks first, who dominates the debate, who speaks loudest and always pushes his own ideas forward, may not be assisting the council to make the best decisions! A good chairman will ensure that everyone is given the opportunity to contribute, not by putting councillors on the spot but by using empowering phrases such as “Is there anyone who hasn’t yet spoken that wants to add anything new?”.

2. Add diversity to the group

“Besides diversity of opinion, which will help you avoid pitfalls like groupthink, including more women in the group has also shown to improve group intelligence.”

This might be more difficult to achieve in the parish and town council world where the make-up of a council is partly determined through the ballot box, but even that can be influenced by ensuring that candidacy is promoted across the whole community and that cronyism is avoided. And when councils have a casual vacancy to fill there is an opportunity to think about the diversity of the council and take that into consideration when co-opting.

3. Generate a large number of ideas

“On the first day of class, a ceramics teacher announced that he was dividing the class into two groups. At the end of the semester, one group would be graded solely based on the quantity of work they produced; the other group would be graded solely on the quality of their work. One group began cranking out clay pots while the other worked to create a single perfect pot.



When it came time to grade the projects at the end of the semester, something unexpected happened. The teacher noticed that the group responsible for creating a large quantity of work also had higher quality pots. Instead of trying to perfect a single pot, the second group would have been better off producing more work and selecting the best from the group. The same principle is true with groups and ideas.

A characteristic of high-performing groups, as shown in a study published in Science, is that they produce a large number of ideas. Smart groups learn to quickly process and consider a large number of ideas while less intelligent groups consider and refine only a few ideas. It turns out the path to quality is paved with quantity.”

4. Keep interactions short

“Meetings don’t last forever (even if they sometimes feel like it). Given that we want to get a large number of ideas as well as feedback from as many people as possible, it’s best to keep discussions and interactions brief. The goal of most interactions should be to validate, invalidate or clarify ideas and build consensus.”

So no long-winded speeches and monologues. It’s up to the chairman to keep representations from councillors and members of the public short and to the point. Less waffle, more business!

5. Share anomalies

“A psychologist set up cameras in four biochemistry labs at Stanford University. He expected to watch scientists experience eureka moments while huddled over a microscope. Instead, most eureka moments happened during group discussions at a conference table, where about a dozen researchers gathered to talk and share ideas”.

The blog concludes *“For those who struggle with ideas and feel as though they only produce “lemons,” the advice in this article should be comforting. When you produce a lemon of an idea, call a meeting, join a group and make lemonade.”*

This fascinating blog is available to read in full at <http://lumiinsight.com/en-gb/blog-en-gb/produce-better-ideas-meetings-gb/>

AT HER MAJESTY'S PLEASURE

By Kevin Nichols, Chairman, Everdon Parish Council

Having been nominated by Northants CALC to be guests at one the 2015 Royal Garden Parties at Buckingham Palace, it was a great privilege and pleasure for my wife and I to attend the event at the end of May. We were very lucky with the weather, on the day, which was dry and sunny, but not overly hot.

Apart from the magnificent surroundings, the sheer scale of the organisation was extremely impressive. At each garden party there are approximately 8,000 guests, all of whom need to arrive at around 3.00pm armed with their invitations and photographic identification. Having said that, whilst the queues at the three entrances were long, guests were dealt with in a very friendly and efficient manner and waiting times were not excessive.

This event was attended by The Queen and the Duke of Edinburgh, together with several senior members of The Royal Family, who circulated through several lines of guests and spoke to a number of them. Whilst two military bands kept the crowds entertained, a very genteel English afternoon tea was enjoyed by the guests. The sandwiches were beautifully made (cut into fingers, with crusts removed !!), accompanied by a huge variety of home-baked, miniature cakes, with ice cream to follow.



Kevin & Susan Nichols.

This event was of a general nature, with guests coming from many walks of life and a variety of industries, including local and public authorities, the military and the diplomatic service. There was time during the afternoon for guests to walk around the 40 acres of Buckingham Palace Gardens, which are not normally open to the public.

Our thanks go to NCALC for the opportunity to attend such a prestigious event and to represent our small part of Northamptonshire.

[The other nominee for 2015 was Cllr Richard Gibbs from Sibbertoft Parish Council who attended with his wife Eileen. The Royal Garden Party nominations are given in recognition of long service to the parish sector.]

FREE TREES PLEASE

Apply before 3rd September 2015 to receive a free tree pack

Building on the success of the scheme run over the last four years Northamptonshire County Council (NCC) is continuing to work with the Woodland Trust to provide free tree packs to communities and schools in Northamptonshire.

During the past three years nearly 300 free packs have gone out to parish councils, schools and communities across Northamptonshire. In conjunction with a parallel project being run with farmers, NCC's partnership with the Woodland Trust has resulted in 125,000 trees planted in the county over the past four years.

Forming part of NCC's efforts to reduce carbon emissions across the county and ensure that Northamptonshire is resilient to the effects of climate change; this project offers a brilliant opportunity to get involved with free tree planting in your area!

Who can apply?

Applications are open to schools, community and youth groups, parish councils and more. To apply for a free tree pack you must be able to meet the following criteria:

- Your group is not-for-profit (you do not need to be officially recognised as a group).
- Trees must be planted on publicly accessible sites (exceptions for schools and youth clubs) and you must have permission from the landowner.
- Your community has been consulted and is supportive of the project, with plenty of volunteer involvement.
- The intended planting site isn't too close to buildings, power lines, roads and other services and packs are appropriate for the area.
- You have identified the grid reference for the planting site.



Young trees growing in the Pitsford Quarry Community Woodland.

What tree packs can I choose from?

Small 30 saplings - Perfect as a starter pack for creating a small copse or hedgerow.

Short hedge - Hawthorn, hazel, holly, dog rose and dogwood.

Small copse - silver birch, rowan and wild cherry.

Medium 105 saplings - Ideal for planting in small groups or a hedge (30m long).

Large 420 saplings - Ideal for creating a longer hedge (120m) or block of trees of approx. 1 acre.

Wild Harvest - Hazel, blackthorn, crab apple, dog rose and elder.

Wildlife - Hawthorn, rowan, blackthorn, silver birch, hazel and common oak.

Year-round colour – Rowan, hawthorn, hazel, silver birch, dogwood and wild cherry.

Working wood – Rowan, silver birch, wild cherry, common oak, grey willow and field maple.

Wetland - Downy birch, goat willow, osier, hawthorn, rowan and hazel.

Wild Wood - Downy birch, rowan, hazel, hawthorn, holly and crab apple.

NB - Please note, some species or quantities of species may change subject to availability.

For more information and to apply, please see the Woodland Trust website: -

<http://www.woodlandtrust.org.uk/get-involved/plant-trees/in-your-community/>

For community pack enquiries, please email: -

communitytrees@woodlandtrust.org.uk

For school pack enquiries, please email: -

learning@woodlandtrust.org.uk

AN INSIDER'S STORY

Neil Jagger, a parish councillor from Northamptonshire has become a published author by writing about village life. *Parley Pole* unfolds over eight seasons, it describes the interlocking lives of rural characters, the workings of the beleaguered parish and ambitious parochial councils and the travails of the care home, principle farmer, lady of the manor and underfunded village hall. Included is an elderly romance, a coming of age, a cross cultural marriage and a touching,

youthful love affair. Disparate residents unite to resist the threat of a secondary school and a minerals pit being located in their parish.

The author's insight brings a complete rural village to intriguing, but realistic life.

To grab your copy of *Parley Pole: All about a village*, visit

<http://www.amazon.co.uk/Parley-Pole-All-about-village/dp/1785072137>.

FLY THE FLAG

A letter from Cllr Ken Browse, Chairman, National Association of Local Councils (NALC)

9 March this year marked Commonwealth Day 2015. Over 750 Commonwealth flags were raised together at 10am that morning by local authorities (including 191 town councils) and a small number of others, throughout the United Kingdom, Channel Islands, Isle of Man, UK Overseas Territories and the Commonwealth, with His Excellency Kamallesh Sharma, Commonwealth secretary-general, raising the final flag outside the Great West Door of Westminster Abbey, London, before attending the annual Commonwealth Observance there that day.

This was the largest, single, raising of the Commonwealth flag in the history of the Commonwealth, which bodes well for the future, especially as this event is to become an annual occasion growing in size and stature over the next few years, involving the countries and communities of all the other 52 Commonwealth countries on Commonwealth Day each year, (which always falls on the second Monday in March).

I have pleasure therefore, in asking all local (parish and town) councils, to download the 2016 Guide To Taking Part from the Fly a Flag website (<http://flyaflagforthecommonwealth.co.uk>) and would like to encourage your participation in this unique, annual occasion, that will bring the communities and countries of the Commonwealth together in a common celebration of this great family of nations, its diverse cultures and communities.

Please go to page 5 of the guide to enable you to see how you can take part, and where to obtain your 90' x 54' Commonwealth flag for the 14 March 2016. (Once used, the flag can be stored away in readiness for Commonwealth Day 2017 and beyond, so please look upon the purchase of the Commonwealth flag as an investment for the future).

Your flag could either be raised by your mayor, chairman of the council, or you may wish to invite a young person from a local school to raise it on your behalf, especially as the youth of the Commonwealth are the future of the Commonwealth.

It is important that those taking part, should complete the online registration form found at Fly a Flag by no later than the 29 January 2016 to ensure your involvement is registered to enable the public and media alike, to attend your flag raising ceremony on the morning of the 14 March 2016. (Those that have taken part previously do not have to re-register their involvement unless the town or parish clerk has changed).

And to add to Ken's patriotic call to arms, don't forget...

In 2016 Her Majesty the Queen will celebrate her 90th birthday. The Queen's actual birthday is on 21 April with the official birthday on 11 June 2016. Parish and town councils may want to start thinking about how to mark the occasion. Street parties, commemorative mugs for local school children and the installation of benches or planting of trees are the old favourites. If your council has something more innovative in mind then get in touch (info@northantscalc.com) and the best ideas can be shared in a future *eUpdate*.

WELCOME TO THE COUNCILLORSHIP!

Parish and town councillors come from all walks of life and at election time there is always an influx of new people, with new ideas and new perspectives. In previous election years a councillor turnover of around 25% has been normal. In 2015 that has gone up to around 40%, which means that there are over 600 new parish and town councillors in Northamptonshire alone.

The vast majority of the new intake will be committed and enthusiastic communitarians. They want to do their bit for the community and they are humble enough to understand that they won't know all there is to know about parish councils from Day 1. They would typically seek opportunities to learn, formally by booking on a training course, or informally through talking to fellow councillors and officers to seek guidance and instruction. They will typically spend the first part of their councillorship in listening mode, soaking in "the way things are done around

here” and only when they have become a trusted member of the council team will they put across their own ideas in a constructive and assertive way.

Some councillors however don't have such a balanced and measured approach to their new role and here we take a look at some classic types and how perhaps their passion can be harnessed for the benefit of the council and community.

The “Business Bear”

Parish and town councils are not businesses (although there is no reason whatsoever that they should not be run in a professional and business-like manner). There isn't a “big boss” who has the power to hire and fire and the authority to order other people to do their bidding. When business people come into the parish sector they may get frustrated at the apparent slowness of the decision making process or the sometimes antiquated legislation that councils must operate within. They may think that they can issue an order and that the clerk will immediately jump to it, particularly where said business person has been elected chairman of the council. Sometimes when people have retired from very important and high-status positions in business it is hard for them to adjust to “civilian” life again, where they have no authority vested in them through job title.

Business Bears can be very valuable to a council, if their knowledge and acumen can be harnessed in a positive way. It relies on them having the savvy to know they are in a new world now and having the humility to take the time to understand the new game rules. It might help to organise a one-to-one session for them with an experienced councillor, who can tell them why the constraints of local government exist, that they are now responsible for spending public money not their own (or the company's) and that they are part of a team of equals. If the Business Bear can be encouraged to learn the local government ropes and understand the resource constraints then they will have a wealth of knowledge, life-experience and modern thinking to bring to the council.

The “Cyclops”

Every council at some point will have had a cyclops, a councillor who joined the council in order to further their own pet project or to campaign on a single issue. They have one eye and it is firmly fixed on securing their own objective. They are not much interested in being a team player and they are not particularly bothered about what else the council is doing – unless it takes away focus or resource from their own project. Such councillors are often extremely passionate people. They

have great energy and willpower driving them on. They are like a dog with a bone and they're not letting go until they've reached their goal. These are great attributes if they can be directed for the greater good.

Some people become councillors thinking that by doing so they can change the world (or at least stop the development next to their house). They soon realise of course that it's not that simple – and may even discover that the council's Code of Conduct prevents them speaking on the very thing that made them join the council in the first place! So the first thing is to understand whether or not their single issue is even deliverable. If it isn't deliverable then be honest with them about that. It is better that they know even if it means them resigning and the council having to fill a casual vacancy. If it is deliverable then it's a case of working with them to fit their project in to the overall business plan of the council. They must understand that their project is likely to be one of many and that if they expect the council to support their project then they must become a full member of the team and contribute to other council projects too. And if their project does get delivered make sure they are appointed to another project group straight away because you don't want that energy and enthusiasm to go untapped for too long!

The “Outsider”

A parish or town council is a corporate body; it has a legal identity separate to that of its individual members. The decisions it makes are those of the corporate body and no matter how a councillor voted on a matter they have a corporate responsibility to support the decision. The Outsider takes a different view. He sees himself as “other” and may use language at council meetings such as “When you lot decided...” or “I didn't agree with the council when it...”. They haven't understood that they **are** the council! The Outsider typically has a problem with something or someone connected with the council and they see it as their responsibility to correct it. It might be something mundane such as a perceived lapse in procedure, or something more critical such as the clerk underperforming (in their eyes).

Usually the Outsider has a very good point but they lack the emotional intelligence to put their point across in an appropriate way and they have a tendency to exaggerate and catastrophise. Yes, the council's Equality Policy was due for review three months ago but that doesn't mean that the clerk's performance is therefore shocking and disgraceful, it just means that the policy review is overdue.

The Outsider's tendency to make a mountain out of a mole hill creates friction and actually makes it less likely that they will achieve their aims.

The secret with the Outsider is to bring them back within the collective by showing them how to raise their point in an appropriate way. For example, a council could develop a simple "Area for Improvement" form that any councillor can use to state 1) what they think needs improving 2) what the risk to the council is of inaction 3) how it could be improved 4) the resources required to improve it and 5) the benefit the improvement would bring to the council. Any forms submitted could be included on the agenda for the next council meeting to be considered fully. If the council resolves to not pursue the improvement, and crucially states a reason why, then at least the Outsider feels that his idea was given due consideration.

The "Mutineer(s)"

Sometimes a group of disaffected councillors can develop within a council. They think that the council isn't being run as effectively or efficiently as it could be and that the "controlling minds" need to be overthrown and replaced. Often Mutineers hunt in packs although individual Mutineers can be just as dangerous. Sometimes the mutiny begins outside the council, with a Resident's Association, a Parish Plan or Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group or may even within a political party. Wherever the Mutineers come from they see it as their job to work against, rather than with, the other councillors. Their starting point is that the existing council is not fit for purpose and that they could do better (of course!). Inevitably tensions rise and such councils are characterised by internal bickering rather than focusing on doing brilliant things for the community. The clerk is often left in a very awkward position, being pulled in different directions by the warring factions.

To determine the best way of dealing with Mutineers it is necessary to assess whether or not they have a fair case. It would be wrong to automatically assume that their cause is unjust – maybe the council really does need a shake up! Most of the time the cause is not just and it is based on a complete misunderstanding of the framework within which the council operates and a lack of knowledge of the respective roles of councillors and clerks. The likelihood is that even if the mutiny is successful the new controlling minds will do no better than the last. They discover that actually it's not always as easy as they thought and that the constraints affect them just as much as those before them. Working with the Mutineers, perhaps by having a whole-council development session, may draw out the key issues. A "SWOT" analysis looks at the council's strengths,

weaknesses, opportunities and threats and can help the Mutineers understand perhaps why the council hasn't achieved all they think it should have done.

Common themes

There are two factors that seem to be common to all struggling councils: lack of clarity and lack of training.

Where there is a lack of clarity it is no wonder that misunderstandings occur and that disputes arise from people not understanding the detail of the situation. More needs to be written down. Councils thrive on reports, policies, standing orders and financial regulations. A councillor cannot be criticised for not understanding the rules of the game if the rules of the game have never been codified! It may seem heavy-handed or unnecessary to write everything down but doing so (as simply and concisely as is possible) may save problems arising in the future.

All councils should have a Training Statement of Intent (TSI) along with an associated budget that is appropriate to the size of the council. The TSI should specify that all new councillors must attend a basic training course and that the clerk must attend basic training and then maintain a Continuous Personal Development (CPD) programme, ideally leading to the Certificate in Local Council Administration (CiLCA). Specific training for councillors is also important... for example, have all the members of the planning committee received training on how to respond to planning applications? A good training programme underpins an effective and efficient council and promotes a culture of development.

It's all about the team

The word "team" has been used frequently above but how often does your council work on being a team? If a council only ever meets during official council meetings, which are busy, formal, decision-making events, then it is unlikely that sufficient emphasis is being put on building the team. No wonder then that issues sometimes arise due to a lack of team ethics and people not working well together. Modern "team bonding" activities don't really suit parish and town councils but there are all sorts of ways of team building that feel more comfortable for councillors. For example, why not organise an evening in the village or town hall just for councillors and the clerk to talk about the council, what it means to be a councillor, what the council should or could achieve, what the community thinks of the council, what good things can be built upon and what could be done differently. Having a whole-council session like that can build a real sense of all

being in it together and can set the scene for the council's more formal work in ordinary business meetings.

No magic solution

One of the ideas or suggestions above may suit your situation and may help. But not every errant councillor will respond, and not every dysfunctional team can be recovered. In that situation it is important to have realistic expectations, to take it slowly and to fall back on the rules and regulations that govern council business. An errant councillor is one person with one vote and should not be allowed to exert undue influence over the council. Sometimes such people become the entire focus and they occupy a disproportionate amount of "air time" at council meetings and in between. Try not to allow that to happen and try to keep everything in perspective. The job of a council is to do brilliant things for its community, so it is important to keep that in mind at all times. Good luck!

A DATE FOR YOUR DIARY

The 68th Northants CALC Annual Conference and AGM takes place on Saturday 17 October 2015 from 10.00 a.m. to 1.00 p.m. at The Forum in Towcester (free bacon rolls from 9:15 a.m.!).

17-10-2015

The theme is "The Best Councils..." What makes a good council good? What is "best practice"? There will be a keynote address from a government representative to give the national view of what "The Best Councils" could or should look like and there will be contributions from Northamptonshire parish and town councils giving real-world examples of their own "best practice".

Parish and town councils and parish meetings in membership may send as many delegates to the Conference and AGM as they wish, although only one of the delegates is entitled to vote.

Booking forms have been sent by e-mail to all member councils and should be returned no later than Monday 5 October 2015, either by e-mail to akirkland@northantscalc.com or by post to the usual address.

We hope to see you there!

HEADS UP RE THE EARLY EASTER

By Chris Moses, Personnel Advice & Solutions Ltd

Bank Holiday confusion looms due to the fact that Easter Sunday next year is on 27 March 2016, i.e. in this council year.

The holiday year for most parish and town councils runs alongside the fiscal year, starting in April and ending in March, and typically provide twenty one days leave (25 for 5+ years' service), plus Bank Holidays.

In which case the 2015/16 holiday year will provide ten Bank Holidays, due to Easter falling in March 2016. Consequently, employees can expect two extra days paid leave in the current holiday year.

However, in 2016/17 there will only be six Bank Holidays, due to the absence of Good Friday and Easter Monday within that year.

Councils may have to provide employees with an extra two days holiday, due to the fact that twenty one days plus six Bank Holidays, or a total of 27 days paid leave, will leave employees one day short of the statutory minimum entitlement of twenty eight days paid leave.

To overcome this problem, councils will need to look closely at their employees' contractual entitlements. If the contract provides twenty one days, plus eight Bank Holidays, the council could potentially ask staff to work on two of the Bank Holidays in 2015/16, when there are ten Bank Holidays, as there is no contractual entitlement to ten Bank Holidays.

However, if the contract states twenty one days paid leave plus Bank Holidays, the council will have no other option than to allow staff to take all ten of the Bank Holidays, as well as their twenty one days.

In 2016/17, councils whose contracts state twenty one days plus bank holidays, may have to inform staff that they are to receive an extra days paid leave to ensure that the Working Time Regulations are complied with, and employees receive the statutory minimum of twenty eight days paid leave during the year.

However, longer term employees who have been employed for five years or more, on NJC terms and conditions, and whose holiday entitlement is twenty five days paid leave plus Bank Holidays, will not be entitled to any additional leave, as they will still be receiving above the statutory minimum entitlement of twenty eight days in total.

PROFILE

Christopher Moses is Managing Director of Personnel Advice & Solutions Ltd and a Fellow of the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development. If you have any questions regarding these issues please feel free to contact him on (01529) 305056 or email p.d.solutions@zen.co.uk. While every care has been taken in compiling these notes, Personnel Advice and Solutions Ltd cannot be held responsible for any errors or omissions. These notes are intended to provide general information. Guidance for specific legal problems should be sought separately.

FUEL POVERTY TRAINING

As part of the British Gas Community Action Partnership in Northamptonshire, National Energy Action (NEA) has delivered training in Energy Awareness and will now continue to deliver training in Fuel Debt Advice. The take up for these courses has been extremely high and some of you may have been disappointed to find that the places offered under the Community Action Partnership had already been taken. However, NEA is also able to offer FREE places on a series of awareness raising sessions for both front line staff and community energy champions.

These sessions are designed to help those who come into contact with vulnerable or low income householders as part of their job or activities as a volunteer to spot the signs that someone may be struggling to afford to keep their home warm enough at a cost they can afford. Importantly, these sessions will also explain the assistance available to support such householders and how to sign-post people to these sources of support. The sessions will be 1 – 2 hours long and will be held in District and Borough Councils between September 2015 and January 2016.

If you would be interested in booking one of these free sessions for your staff or volunteers, please do get in touch with the project group. For front line staff (i.e. people in jobs which bring them into contact with householders) please contact Jimmy Pugh on jimmy.pugh@nea.org.uk or 07961 072638. For community energy champions (i.e. volunteers or members of the community) please contact Saleem Sheikh on saleem.sheikh@nea.org.uk or 07545 733953.

Jimmy Pugh will deliver 16 sessions on basic energy awareness training for front line staff from all sectors who have day to day contact with vulnerable householders. Similarly, Saleem Sheikh shall be delivering 10 sessions on basic energy awareness/referral courses for energy champions, together with mentor support to raise awareness of energy efficiency/fuel bill help. The delegates will then hopefully cascade this knowledge down to the 'hard to reach' communities to help them save energy and reduce their fuel bill as well as help them keep warm and healthy.

I'LL SAY A LITTLE PRAYER FOR YOU

The Local Government (Religious etc. Observances) Act 2015 came into force on 26 May 2015 and amends section 138 of the Local Government Act 1972. The 2015 Act provides parish and town councils and parish meetings the power to have prayers as part of their formal meetings.

The background to the Act is the High Court decision in R (on the application of National Secular Society and Bone) v Bideford Town Council [2012] where the Court found that the saying of prayers as part of the formal meeting of a council was not lawful under section 111 of the Local Government Act 1972, and there was no statutory power permitting the practice to continue.



The 2015 Act provides that the business at the meetings of a parish council (its committees, sub- committees, joint committees or sub-joint committees) may include time for prayers or religious observance or observance connected with a religious or philosophical belief (s.138A of the 1972 Act).

The National Association of Local Councils (NALC) advises that *“If prayers are to be included in the business of a council meeting or the assembly of a parish meeting, the agenda must confirm this. The agenda may usefully indicate the time allocated for prayers, which is likely to be of short duration and to take place at the beginning of the meeting. Not everyone (e.g. members of the council, council staff or the public) will want to observe or participate in prayers at a meeting. Therefore the person presiding at a meeting should give people who do not wish to participate in or observe prayers an opportunity to leave the room before prayers commence.”*

COMMUNITY ENERGY

Over ninety percent of the UK energy market is controlled by just six companies. With ever-mounting costs and the threat of climate change, as well as resource scarcity and increasingly volatile international markets exposing the vulnerability of our existing energy supplies, it makes sense for people to want to take control themselves.

The term 'community energy' covers a range of collective actions, from saving or reducing our use of it, to purchasing, managing and generating the stuff. It does not include commercially or Government-supported initiatives, nor isolated, individual efforts. The emphasis is very much on projects involving local engagement, leadership and control, and where there is a benefit to local communities.

What types of community energy projects are out there?

- Initiatives to reduce the carbon footprint of a local area
- Community-owned renewable electricity installations
- Community members switching as a group to a renewable heat source
- A community trial of smart meters, to raise awareness of energy use
- And much, much more...

What are the benefits of community energy?

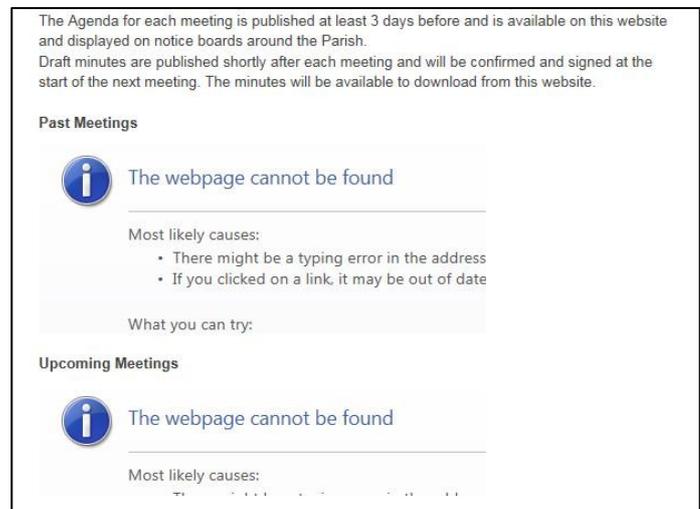
- It reduces greenhouse gas emissions
- Improves energy security
- Supports the local economy and creates jobs
- Keeps the profits generated within the community
- Re-connects people with how energy is generated and how they consume it
- Increases public acceptance of renewable energy schemes

The third annual Community Energy Fortnight takes place from 5 – 20 September 2015. If your council might be interested in taking part this year please visit <http://www.ukcec.org> for all the details.

A CAUTIONARY TALE

Take control of your council's web site - now. All councils should have a web site and for those with a turnover below £25,000 it is now essential to have one due to

the requirements of the Transparency Code. However, many councils use pages on a web site they don't directly control or the council web site was set up by a technically proficient councillor and no one else has access to it. The council must – repeat must – be able to assume control of its web site in a situation where whoever normally updates it is no longer able or willing to do it. Several councils have been left red-faced recently when the council's web site was compromised as a result of a dispute. The screen shot (right) was taken from a council's web site that had been developed by an ex-councillor. When he left the council he removed all the council's documents from it resulting in the council potentially being in non-compliance of the Transparency Code.



Lots of parish and town councils use “grace and favour” arrangements to provide their web presence, and there is nothing wrong with that, but the absolute minimum requirement should be that the clerk and chairman of the council have the ability to change the main username and password of the site, so that if anything happens the site can be secured and locked down. If no one on the council knows how to do that and the council is completely reliant on a third party then feel free to contact Northants CALC and we'll point you in the right direction.

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 September - October 2015

New Clerks (Day 1 of 2)

Sat, 12 Sep 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 (Session 5 of 7)

Tue, 15 Sep 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.

Off to a Flying Start

Wed, 23 Sep 2015 6:30pm

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.

New Clerks (Day 2 of 2)

Sat, 26 Sep 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.

Chairmanship Training

Mon, 28 Sep 2015 7:00pm

How to conduct an efficient and effective council meeting, Dealing with disruptive councillors and/or members of the public, The statutory role of Chairman – and all the other roles you weren't told about when you were elected, and The one secret that will make your meetings better – and shorter!

For information on any of these courses please see

www.northantscalc.com/events.html or for further information contact Anne Kirkland, Training Manager, on 01327 831482 or akirkland@northantscalc.com.

All courses must be accompanied by a course booking form, which can be downloaded from www.northantscalc.com.

You can also book online at <http://www.northantscalc.com/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

Full details and contact details for the vacancies below are available at <http://www.northantscalc.com/job-vacancies.html>.

Creaton Parish Council

Creaton is a small village in the heart of the district of Daventry approximately 9 miles north west of Northampton. There are 390 electors and the council has 8 seats. The council has an immediate vacancy for a Clerk & RFO and the position is permanent part-time at 8 hours per week. For 2015/16 the council set a precept of £16,950. The closing date for applications is 14 August 2015.

Overthorpe Parish Council

Overthorpe is a very small village right on the western border of Northamptonshire and just 2 miles east of Banbury in Oxfordshire. There are 152 electors and the council has 5 seats. In 2015/16 the council set a precept of £7,600. The council is seeking a Clerk/RFO on a permanent part-time basis at 20 hours per month. The closing date for applications is 28 August 2015.

Hardingstone Parish Council

Hardingstone is a suburban village on the outskirts of Northampton. It is 3 miles to the south of Northampton town centre. The council has an immediate vacancy for a Clerk & RFO. The position is permanent, part-time at 720 hours per annum (av. 13.85 hrs/wk). The council has 1,656 electors and a precept of £22k for 2015/16. The closing date for applications is Wednesday 12 August 2015 so again, act fast!

Hunsbury Meadows Parish Council

Hunsbury Meadows is a relatively new and growing settlement to the south west of Northampton approximately 4 miles from the town centre. There are 812 electors currently and for 2015/16 the council set a precept of £14,220. The council has a vacancy for a Clerk & RFO working 20 hours per month from home. The closing date for applications is Monday 24 August 2015 and full details are below.

Hackleton Parish Council

Hackleton is a larger parish to the south east of Northampton taking in the settlements of Hackleton, Piddington and Horton in the district of South Northamptonshire. There are 1,700 electors in the parish. The Council has an

immediate vacancy for a Clerk/RFO. The position is permanent part-time at 12 hours per week. The council has 11 councillors and set a precept for 2015/16 of £48,000. The closing date for applications is 17 August 2015. Full details below.

Cranford Parish Council

Due to the imminent retirement of the Clerk, Cranford Parish Council is looking for a suitable person to fill this challenging post. The ideal candidate will have CiLCA qualification or experience in local government. This is an ideal position for a proactive person. This is a part-time post and the current contract is for 25 hours per month at a pay rate of £9.50 per hour. Please apply in writing to: Peter Quincey, Parish Clerk, Cranford, 35 Newton Rd., Geddington, Kettering, NN14 1AU, Tel: 01536 461189, or Email: Cranfordcouncil@aol.com. The closing date for applications is 14 August 2015.

Pitsford Parish Council

Pitsford village is in the Daventry District 4 miles from the centre of Northampton. Pitsford Parish Council is seeking a Clerk and RFO. The council has 8 councillors, an electorate of approximately 550 and a precept for 2015/16 of £16,972. The Council has no direct responsibility for recreational/playing fields, burial grounds or community buildings. Benefiting from a wonderful location, a wide range of property and a pretty conservation area, Pitsford Reservoir and the Nature Reserve - one of the largest in Europe. The vacancy is permanent part-time (6 hours per week) and the closing date for applications is 31 August 2015.

Barnwell Parish Council

Please find below details of a vacancy for a Clerk and RFO to Barnwell Parish Council. The village of Barnwell is 3 miles south of Oundle in East Northamptonshire. The council has 7 councillors and there are 349 electors. The council set a precept of £6,700 for 2015/16. The vacancy is permanent part-time (18.5 hours per month) and the closing date for applications is 31 August 2015.

Northants CALC is also aware of upcoming vacancies in Kettering and Wellingborough. Please contact Northants CALC if you are seeking a clerkship.

To find out about the role of the Clerk download an introductory booklet entitled "*The Essential Clerk*" at: www.northantscalc.com/uploads/essentialclerk.pdf

NORTHANTS CALC CONTACTS

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