

Update

ISSUE 3/15

May - June 2015

CONTENTS

- **THE CHIEF'S BRIEF**
- **A LETTER FROM KEN**
- **THE WOMEN'S TOUR**
- **LOCAL GOVERNMENT OMBUDSMAN (LGO)**
- **OI, GET OFF MY LAND!**
- **BRING YOUR COMMUNITY PROJECTS TO LIFE**
- **CHANGE OF E-MAIL ADDRESS**
- **POTHoles SHOULD BE A PRIORITY**
- **SMILE, YOU'RE ON CAMERA**
- **NN ONE – JOINING UP LOCAL GOVERNMENT INFORMATION**
- **ALL ABOUT TRANSPARENCY**
- **PARISH EMERGENCY PLANNING**
- **TAKING THE LEAD ON DOG CONTROL**
- **CONVICTION POLITICS**
- **A CAUTIONARY TALE**
- **TRAINING AND DEVELOPMENT FOR LOCAL COUNCILS**
- **SITUATIONS VACANT**
- **CONTACT DETAILS**

THE CHIEF'S BRIEF

By Danny Moody, Chief Executive, Northants CALC

It scarcely seems possible that at the time of writing it is only three weeks since polling day when the country elected an outright conservative government and many also elected district/borough and parish/town councillors too.

I would like to congratulate all the councillors who stood for re-election and were successfully returned, and I would like to welcome into the sector all the new councillors who were standing for the first time. There are 1,898 parish and town councillors in Northamptonshire who, even at a conservative estimate, contribute over £4 million in time each year to their communities.

I would also like to thank all the parish and town clerks in the county for all they did to promote the elections and to encourage candidacy. With a high number of retiring councillors this time there was a great need to recruit and I'm pleased to report that the number of contested elections was up on 2011. Many clerks have a significant number of new councillors and one or two even have a whole council that is completely new! New councillors bring vibrancy and fresh eyes but also present a challenge as they fit in to the team and embark on their steep learning curve. Clerks have their work cut out in what is already a busy time of year with annual meetings and the end of year processes.

I would like to give a special welcome to Northamptonshire's two newest parish councils. On 1 April 2015 the civil parish of Wootton and East Hunsbury in the borough of Northampton was divided in two to create Wootton, Wootton Fields and Simpson Manor Parish Council and East Hunsbury Parish Council. Both councils have twelve seats and whilst some of the W&EHPC councillors stood for the new councils many of the councillors are brand new. How exciting to be one of the founding members of a brand new parish council! Welcome to the Northamptonshire parish and town council family.

The 2015 elections have also thrown up an unprecedented number of unusual procedural situations; ones that the Local Government Act 1972 does not adequately provide for. The law tends to assume that the election result is straightforward, that the council has its full complement of members and that all are available for the May meeting, including the outgoing chairman, whether or not he stood for re-election. But as we know, life in parish and town councils is not

always that straightforward! The enquiries have certainly get us on our toes at Northants CALC, so bear with us as we catch up with the enquiries not related to elections and annual meetings!

There's been much change nationally too. Our sector has a new political leader in the svelte figure of The Right Honourable Greg Clark MP, Secretary of State at the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG). Eric Pickles MP was the only cabinet member to not be appointed to a new government role but he does get the consolation prize of a knighthood; arise Sir Eric. The key question for us is what will the change in Secretary of State mean for parish and town councils? Greg Clarke is not unknown to the sector and in previous interviews given in NALC's LCR magazine he has shown himself to be



Greg Clarke MP

knowledgeable about parish and town councils and supportive of their role in local government. He is also in favour of moving power away from Whitehall to the most local level possible. There has already been a range of interesting "position statements" from ministers at DCLG and Defra that suggest that the policy future for parish and town councils looks bright; although they have been quickly followed up with the caveat that there will be no new money to support the policies! Time will tell.

The elections have dominated our work in the past six weeks but other things have happened too. On 18 & 25 April I had the pleasure of running our spring New Clerks course and I was very impressed by the calibre of the delegates. There has been a high turnover of clerks recently (I think many were using the election as the time to hang up their boots) that has resulted in something of a changing of the guard.

I have attended several Annual Parish Meetings and Annual Council Meetings and it is always good to see parishes at work first hand. I welcome the positive sounds coming out of DCLG but I sometimes think that they have no idea whatsoever of what it is really like "on the ground". Only when you have spent an evening listening to a debate about highway maintenance in a village hall that is sometimes freezing and sometimes scorching, depending on the cycle of the

radiant heaters that come on with a big electrical “clonk” and a corresponding slight dimming of the lights, can you have a real understanding of local government at grass roots!

Our training and development programme has been active too over the past two months. On 22 April we held a briefing session for prospective members of the Local Council Award Scheme (LCAS) County Accreditation Panel. The Panel is now established and will determine the first application in the middle of June. LCAS replaces the old Quality Parish Scheme (QPS) and provides councils with a method for benchmarking themselves against agreed sector standards. Foundation Stage should be achievable by every council and represents minimum expectations for lawful operation, Quality Stage reflects good practice in governance, community engagement and council improvement, and Quality Gold represents excellence and is for councils at the forefront of best practice.

Training sessions have been delivered on the new Transparency Code for councils with less than £25,000 turnover, the Code of Conduct for councillors and the Annual Return and audit process. Over the next few weeks we have several Off to a Flying Start sessions for new councillors (or those that have never received any formal training before). We will run additional sessions as demand indicates.

On 20 May the Chairman of Northants CALC, Richard Lewis, and I met with Dr Paul Blantern, Chief Executive of Northamptonshire County Council (NCC). With all the change that’s going on in local government at every level it is essential that the relationship between parish and town councils and the county council is clear and fit for purpose. As NCC goes through its biggest ever restructuring it is important that parish and town councils are seen as part of the solution, not part of the problem. A half-day session will be held in the summer with NCC to explore what role parish and town councils should have in the county’s “Next Generation” model.

Northants CALC provides a quality member service with just three members of staff (2.2 Full Time Equivalents) and we are kept incredibly busy by the 263 parish and town councils and parish meetings across the county. Our Training Manager, Anne Kirkland, will be off work in June so we will be short-staffed for a few weeks; please treat us gently! Exciting plans are being drawn up to expand the Association by creating new parish councils in previously unparished areas in the

boroughs of Northampton, Kettering, Wellingborough and Corby. This is long term development and will be done as a ring-fenced, externally funded project so that it doesn't draw from existing resources. More than half the population of the county live in unparished areas and cannot benefit from the local governance and representation that parish and town councils provide. No one will care about a community more than the people that live in it, so communities without councils are really disadvantaged compared to their parished neighbours. This is an inequality that needs to be addressed and it will be to the advantage of existing parish councils too as it will strengthen their voice locally and nationally. Regular updates will be provided, so watch this space!

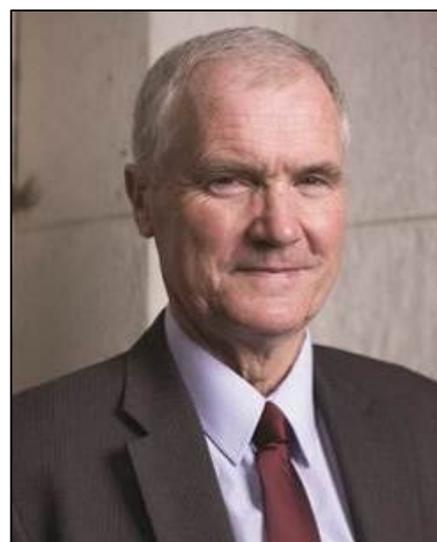
Please do continue to get in touch with your queries and questions. That's what we're here for!

A LETTER FROM KEN

Cllr Ken Browse is the Chairman of the National Association of Local Councils (NALC). This letter is written to all parish and town councillors in England:

Dear Councillor,

As chairman of your national body I wanted to be among the first to congratulate you, whether you are a new or returning councillor. I wish you the very best of luck in the years ahead as you take up civic office to support and develop your community.



Ken Browse

You are now part of a successful, effective and growing national movement. A movement of 80,000 councillors contributing over eight million volunteer hours a year, with 9,000 local (parish and town) councils investing around one billion pounds to make our communities better, improve quality of life and give local people a voice.

Local councils in England are the backbone of local democracy and are of increasing importance. Over 200 new councils have been set-up over the last decade, with local councils continuing to expand their role, taking on new responsibilities and services from other authorities and organisations.

I am proud to serve you as the chairman of NALC, and I will seek to do three important things on your behalf:

- raise our profile amongst Parliament, civil servants and the media to ensure we get the recognition and respect we deserve, whilst encouraging more people to get involved;
- support your county association of local councils (CALC) and work together to deliver high quality services and provide the tools you need to help you serve your community;
- campaign on behalf of the sector and promote our [manifesto](#) goals for a stronger local democracy, fairer funding and more powers.

In return, I would ask you to do three things to help me:

- act as a positive advocate, engaging with MPs and local media, letting them (and NALC) know of all the great work you are doing to improve your local area;
- get involved with your CALC and NALC, by working together we can ensure we have a strong local and national voice; use our services, attend conferences and training, and give us feedback on how we can improve;
- sign up for the [Local Council Award Scheme](#), which helps us demonstrate to government, principal authorities and the general public that we are an efficient, effective and well-run part of local government.

I wish you all the best in your endeavours over the next few years and hope to meet some of you at local and national events and visits.

If you want to find out more about our work, including our events, initiatives we run and support and the help and advice we can provide, please visit our website: www.nalc.gov.uk.

Kind regards,

Councillor Ken Browse, Chairman, National Association of Local Councils

THE WOMEN'S TOUR

The world's top female cyclists will race from Oundle to Kettering this June, as Northamptonshire plays host to the 138-kilometre, 86-mile, third stage of the Aviva Women's Tour.

Friday 19 June will see 16 of the world's top cycling teams, including the likes of Wiggle Honda, Boels Dolmans and world number one team Rabo Liv, heading to Northamptonshire for a stage that will take in Gretton, Corby, Rothwell, Desborough and Brixworth among other locations.

With an uphill drag into Kettering town centre ahead of the finish coming at the end of what will be the longest stage of the 2015 Aviva Women's Tour, the Northamptonshire stage could well prove crucial for the destination of the race leader's Aviva Yellow Jersey.

Cllr Heather Smith, deputy leader at Northamptonshire County Council, said: *"This world-class event offers a wonderful opportunity for us to bring people together and inspire them to think about their own health and fitness and hopefully get cycling too. Last year we saw more than 600 people take up cycling as a result of led cycle rides organised as part of the Women's Tour and 11 schools have set up new cycling clubs.*

"This is a fantastic legacy from the inaugural Aviva Women's Tour and we will be working to build on that as excitement builds for the tour's return to the county this summer."

Double European champion and Matrix Fitness rider Helen Wyman, who this year counts double Olympic Champion and current British Road Race Champion Laura Trott among her teammates, said; *"The Aviva Women's Tour changed the face of women's professional racing in 2015 and I'm extremely excited about coming back in 2015. Racing through Northamptonshire, with the enthusiasm of the crowds was a huge highlight in my racing year last year. Hopefully this year, I can do my bit to help deliver the British Champion to a victory in Northamptonshire as part of the Matrix Fitness team."*

Starting at 10am, Stage Three is expected to finish in Kettering at around 2.15pm, with highlights of the race being shown on ITV4 that evening, with a repeat the following morning.

Heading west from Oundle to Upper Benefield, the stage will loop back to Oundle before heading north to Fotheringhay and Kings Cliffe. The race will then pass through Harringworth and Gretton, climbing from Rockingham into Corby on the road past Rockingham Castle. After heading into Corby, Stage Three will then head to Rothwell and pass through Desborough, as it did for the opening leg in 2014 then head to Kelmars and Naseby, passing close to the famous Naseby Field battle site and on to Ravensthorpe, Spratton and Brixworth before racing into Kettering via Thorpe Malsor and the finish in the Market Place.

The locations for the two intermediate Sprints and two Queen of the Mountain climbs will be announced in the coming weeks.

Oundle Town Mayor Gwen Radcliffe (pictured right in the mayoral chains) said: *“The Grand Depart of the inaugural Aviva Women’s Tour from Oundle in 2014 was certainly memorable. I am delighted that Oundle’s contribution to the success of the event has been recognised. We are thrilled to host the start of this year’s third stage start with the exciting bonus of the riders racing through the town on the loop.”*



The 2015 official launch event took place in Kettering (this year’s finish) in March

“Northamptonshire played a key role in the first ever Aviva Women’s Tour, so we are delighted to be returning to the county this June,” said Race Director Mick Bennett.

“The county combines beautiful, typical English countryside with some very testing roads and climbs. At the longest stage of the race, we expect it to be a key element of the Aviva Women’s Tour and set things up perfectly going into the weekend’s stages.”

www.womenstour.co.uk

LOCAL GOVERNMENT OMBUDSMAN (LGO)

When a complaint is made against a parish or town council the complainant's first recourse is to the council's internal complaints procedure. Councils should have a written procedure that ensures that complaints are dealt with fairly, openly and swiftly. If a complainant is dissatisfied by the outcome of a complaints process there is currently no other body to which they can go, other than seeking Judicial Review in the High Court, which is a lengthy and costly business. The situation is different for principle (district, borough, county) councils where, having exhausted the internal complaints procedure, a complainant can take the issue to the Local Government Ombudsman (LGO).

Now the Government is consulting on extending the remit of the LGO to parish and town councils. Government states that it is consulting on extending the jurisdiction to '*larger parish and town councils responsible for substantial sums of public money and whose decisions affect a large number of people*'. However, it is possible that, depending on the responses to the consultation and Government's underlying policy positions, the extension could be rolled out further. Additionally, the concept of 'larger' councils has yet to be defined. This is potentially a controversial subject with some councils welcoming the application of an external complaints body and others preferring self-regulation and local determination of complaints.

Northants CALC and NALC are broadly in favour of the proposal but as always the devil is in the detail. For example, how long would parish councils be given to implement any decision notices and would the remit cover any council complaint.

If your council would like a say the consultation details are available at:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/extending-the-remit-of-the-local-government-ombudsman-to-larger-parish-and-town-councils>. The consultation closes at 11:45pm on 30 June 2015.

OI, GET OFF MY LAND!

As the summer approaches the possibility increases of unlawful or unauthorised occupation of council land and public open space. Parish and town councils faced with illegal or unauthorised encampments can benefit from new Government guidance "*Dealing with illegal and unauthorised encampments - A summary of*

available powers”, which seeks to underline that prompt action can be taken using a broad range of powers. This document can help councils to understand what action they might take and what action they can expect and encourage enforcing authorities to take when faced with unauthorised encampments. It also highlights that enforcing authorities should not ‘*gold plate human rights and equalities legislation*’ and should take into account the various adverse impacts on the community caused by failure of the relevant authorities to act.

Some local protocols have been set up by local public service providers, including the police and principal local authorities. Local councils might also wish to consider these alongside this list of powers when faced with illegal or unauthorised encampments.

The guidance is available to download at:

https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/418139/150326_Dealing_with_illegal_and_unauthorised_encampments_-_final.pdf

BRING YOUR COMMUNITY PROJECTS TO LIFE

Land and buildings that you care about in your community, such as your local park, your town hall, local pub or shop can be managed and even owned using new tools for community asset ownership and management.

NALC, DCLG and Locality have partnered to deliver the Community Ownership and Management of Assets (COMA) programme, 2015-16.

Applications for grant funding under the programme are encouraged from councils that are part of a broader community partnership seeking to take over the management or running of a complex asset or multiple assets.

Community assets such as community centres, parks or facilities for children, and privately owned facilities such as pubs and shops are valuable for the wellbeing of communities.

Over 1,500 assets up and down the country have been listed as assets of community value under the Right to Bid legislation and hundreds of assets are now run by communities themselves. Feedback suggests that there is a real appetite for more support.

The COMA programme & grants aim to help fill the gap in support for partnership working between community organisations and local public bodies. It will strengthen and increase opportunities for communities to take on the management and/or ownership of multiple assets and ground-breaking single asset projects that are important to the community, specifically those in public ownership.

The programme will support up to 50 partnerships between local public bodies such as local authorities and community groups (including parish councils) to develop multiple asset transfers or single, ground breaking asset projects.

To find out more about the programme and the grants available visit [http://mycommunity.org.uk/programme/community-assets/? a=funding](http://mycommunity.org.uk/programme/community-assets/?a=funding).

CHANGE OF E-MAIL ADDRESS

Thank you to those of you that have already updated your address books with our new e-mail addresses, which have changed from name@northantscalc.gov.uk to name@northantscalc.com.

The change is because of an update to the Naming Rules for the dot gov domain, meaning that companies limited by guarantee, such as Northants CALC, are no longer eligible to use the dot gov extension.

The web address is now www.northantscalc.com.

Please see the back page of this *eUpdate* for all contact details and, if you have not already done so, update your records accordingly. To ensure a safe switchover the dot gov addresses will continue to receive mail until mid-June but after that any mail sent to those addresses will not be delivered.

POTHoles SHOULD BE A PRIORITY

It should come as no surprise to parish and town councils that motorists believe that the government should make tackling potholes a priority. More than 50 per cent of motorists believe the coalition government did not make the issue enough of a concern, according to a survey conducted by the Institute of Advanced Motorists (IAM).

A total of 2,156 people took part in the IAM survey throughout March 2015. The number one gripe amongst those who answered the poll said reducing the number of potholes should be the government's number one action point, with 70 per cent of respondents voting for this.

With the backlog of repairs now topping £12 billion according to the Asphalt Industry Alliance (AIA), the organisation says that funding a long term action plan must be an early priority for the new government.

The AIA also said at the end of March that money spent on filling 2.7 million potholes in the past year had been "wasted."

The next biggest concern for road users was that of general road maintenance, with more than 64 per cent of those surveyed stating this needed more attention.

Third in the list was reducing the number of road accidents and casualties for all age groups, with 52 per cent of respondents saying it should be a greater government concern. Road crashes still cost the UK economy £15.6 billion every year.

According to the Department for Transport the number of those killed or seriously injured on UK roads has increased by 4 per cent as of September 2014 in comparison to 2013.

Neil Greig, IAM director of policy and research, said: *"No government can be complacent about these figures and we all need to do more to reduce the numbers killed and injured on our roads."*

"Cuts in visible policing and road safety spending have had an impact. While these figures cannot be regarded as a trend, they are a major concern that the new Parliament must address."

The fourth aspect of motoring life respondents wanted to see changed was the current driving test. The survey revealed over 41 per cent of motorists thought the UK driving test is not fit for purpose and would like to see the government make it more relevant to today's driving landscape.

As part of the IAM's key road safety goals, embracing changes to the driver training system can help reduce new driver risk in the first six months of solo driving. The IAM manifesto advocates the delivery of theory and hazard perception tests in education establishments, a practical test that includes high speed roads and a graduated licencing system that ensures all new drivers undertake a minimum learning period prior to taking the practical test.

And rounding out the top five, respondents wanted to see an increase in sentences for those guilty of serious motoring offences, with 39 per cent of people wanting to see this happen.

The Northamptonshire Highways Maintenance Initiative (NMHI) was launched in April 2010 and aims to get it "right first time" by:

- Being less reactive and having more planned repairs
- Making permanent repairs, except when emergency repairs are required
- Focusing on prevention
- Understanding and communication

The current service standard is to make a permanent repair to Category 1 potholes within 5 working days. A Category 1 pothole is usually one that is greater than 75mm deep on any highway, or one that is greater than 50mm deep on a strategic route or secondary distributor route. Other local factors may be taken into consideration when categorising potholes, such as proximity to crossing places.



Fixed. Permanently.

Northamptonshire Highways has attracted new government funding to help with the back log of pothole repairs and the Highways Warden Scheme (where each parish and town council appoints a person to act as an additional pair of eyes and

ears for Northamptonshire Highways), helps direct resources to where they are needed most.

Anyone can report highway problems online or use their mobile phone, 24 hours a day 7 days a week. Problems such as potholes, overgrown verges and cracked pavements can all be reported online in just 5 easy steps and you will receive regular updates. Go to www.northamptonshire.gov.uk/streetdoctor to learn more or to report a problem.

SMILE, YOU'RE ON CAMERA

A change in the law last summer means that members of the public (indeed anyone, including councillors, staff and visitors) are permitted to record the proceedings of a parish or town council without first having to obtain permission from the council. The recording can be covert or overt, as long as it is not causing a disruption.

The Openness of Local Government Bodies Regulations 2014 came into force in August 2014 (see the July/Aug *eUpdate* at www.northantscalc.com for a full article) and is being used up and down the country by people wishing to shine a light on their local council, for good or for bad! A quick search on YouTube reveals some very interesting footage indeed!

A few parish and town councils in Northamptonshire are recording their own meetings so that there is an "official" record should an unscrupulous member of the public attempt to misrepresent proceedings, or edit the footage in such a way as to discredit the council.

The biggest concern is covert recording. When a member of the public is obviously recording it is easy for councillors to remember that what they are saying will be captured and may be published on the Internet for all to hear, but when the recording is covert councillors can easily be lulled into a false sense of security, unaware that what they are saying could be tomorrow's YouTube sensation!

Recording of council meetings is still rare, and there haven't been any Northamptonshire councils on YouTube thus far, but it is only a matter of time

before an unsuspecting councillor somewhere says something that they wish was not recorded for permanent posterity!

Councillors (and clerks for that matter) should not be fettered by the possibility of being recorded, but it is always good to remember that a council meeting is a formal, decision-making meeting of a local authority, and not a place for idle gossip and chit-chat!

Has your council had any experiences, good or bad, with the new recording rules? Get in touch with your stories by e-mail to dmoody@northantscalc.com.

NN ONE – JOINING UP LOCAL GOVERNMENT INFORMATION

NN One, a project delivered in partnership between Northants CALC and 2Commune, aims to help increase the capacity of Local Councils in Northamptonshire.

New technology will enable local councils to become more efficient and effective. All tiers of authorities will benefit from improved communications.



NN One will replicate the proven '[Leicestershire Model](#)' which joins up websites and back end systems across the three tiers of local government to provide a county-wide:

- View of undecided planning applications
- Database of local council contacts
- A-Z of Services Directory (combines parish, county and district services)

Northamptonshire County Council (NCC) is pleased to be working with Northants CALC) on the “NN One” project. Northants CALC used to provide a list of parish clerks to the county council on a quarterly basis. Now NCC’s systems link directly with Northants CALC’s web site and the list is updated on a daily basis. Any changes made by Northants CALC are reflected across NCC’s systems the next day. Richard Beards, Web / Digital Manager from the county council says *“Joining up information across the tiers of local government adds value. It means we are working with accurate, up to date information, and by working off the same*

contacts database we are reducing duplication of effort, which is better for Northamptonshire residents.”

Daventry District Council (DDC) is the first district or borough council in Northamptonshire to sign up to NN One and make its planning application database accessible to the project. It enables undecided planning applications to be viewed on a Google map within a parish council's own web site. It means that anyone can look up applications in the parish and, critically, those just over the parish border too! To see a demonstration of the Planning Aggregator in action head over to <http://www.localcouncils.org/beta-moulton/planning-applications1.html>.

It is hoped that in time all seven of the county's district and borough councils will join NN One to share their information.

ALL ABOUT TRANSPARENCY

New rules for parish councils with less than £25,000 “turnover” came into effect on 1 April 2015. The plan is that those councils will no longer have a routine external audit (from 2017) but instead will publish certain information on a web site in order to be more open and accountable to the public, starting now.

However, the implementation of the new Transparency Code and the associated Transparency Fund has been, well, not very transparent! The government announced the Transparency Code late last year and Northants CALC wrote to all councils that were affected on 18 December 2014 setting out what the new rules would mean. At the time there were many questions about how exactly the Code would operate, and most of those questions still remain. The Transparency Fund was announced with great fanfare at the end of March and will see £4.7 million over three years allocated to assist parish councils implement the Transparency Code. However since the announcement there has been no further news on how the fund will work and what the application/award criteria will be. Perhaps there was some reason why the government needed to rush out the high-profile, multi-million pound announcement six weeks before the general election.

The Code requires councils to publish two types of information: annual information and ongoing information. The ongoing information includes minutes, agendas and papers of formal meetings. Councils should publish meeting agendas, which are

as full and informative as possible and associated meeting papers not later than three clear days before the meeting to which they relate is taking place. The information to be published annually includes the end of year accounts, the internal auditor's report and a list of payments over £100.

“Published” means posted on a freely accessible web site, either one owned or controlled by the parish council or, if such a site is not available, then on the web site of the district/borough council. In practice parish councils would be ill-advised to use their district council web site because they would not be able to control publication of meeting agendas and papers within the required timeframe. Cost effective, even free web site templates are available, so there is no excuse for a parish or town council not to have its own web presence.

Monitoring, compliance and penalty are all areas that remain unexplained under the new arrangements. For example, supposing a parish council publishes an agenda under the Code with only two clear days before the meeting instead of three; what happens? There is no agency tasked with overseeing compliance with the Code and external audit can't be “triggered” by the non-compliance because, for now at least, external audit occurs regardless. There appears to be no provision for sanction or penalty for non-compliance, which rather dilutes what is supposed to be a mandatory Code. There are however two controls: Firstly there's the professional pride of parish councils to do what is expected of them, along with an innate obedience to follow rules and procedures. Secondly there are certain members of the public, the “persistent complainants”, who are now empowered and emboldened by the Code. Good councils go out of their way to avoid giving ammunition to such people, who can easily become a thorn in the council's side if left unmanaged.

As more detail emerges, particularly on the Transparency Fund, Northants CALC will keep all affected councils informed. In the meantime a training course entitled “*Openness and Accountability – Should Councils Bother?*”, which ran for the first time on 28 April in Litchborough, is being repeated in the evening of Monday 8 June in Raunds (see <http://www.northantscalc.com/openness-and-accountability--sh.html> for details and booking). It will help you get your head round all this!

If you've lost the copy sent to you in December the Code can be downloaded from <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/transparency-code-for-smaller-authorities>

PARISH EMERGENCY PLANNING

Northamptonshire County Council's Emergency Planning Team is organising an event to show communities how to develop emergency and flood plans and to encourage engagement and greater resilience within their communities.

The Community Resilience course will take place on Thursday 9 July 2015 at 6pm and will be repeated on Thursday 8 October 2015 at 6pm, both in Northampton.

By the end of the session, participants will develop knowledge of:

- Risks to the community using local knowledge and resources
- Developing the communities Emergency and Flood Plan
- Identifying vulnerable premises and people to support in times of need
- Identifying Key Players to support community resilience
- Assessing the strengths, needs and interest
- Convening Conversations and Round tables
- Establishing an Ongoing Mechanism

For details of this course and others that may be of interest please visit

<http://www.northamptonshire.gov.uk/en/councilservices/fire/emergencies/Pages/Emergency-Planning-Events-Calendar.aspx>.

And just on the off-chance that when the July/August *eUpdate* is published the summer is already with us, here's a link to the latest in NCC's series of "Don't be a Numpty" videos; this one is about staying safe during hot weather:

<http://www.northamptonshire.gov.uk/en/councilservices/fire/emergencies/emergency-prevention/pages/summer.aspx>

TAKING THE LEAD ON DOG CONTROL

People in the district of Daventry will be asked for their views on proposals to introduce new powers to target irresponsible dog owners.

Daventry District Council is considering introducing a Public Space Protection Order (PSPO), giving its enforcement officers broader powers to deal with dog

owners who fail to properly control their pets in public open spaces across the district.

As part of that, people will be asked if they would support the introduction of a new offence under the Order which would require dog walkers to carry a poop bag or other means for clearing up after their pet.

If introduced, it would mean Council enforcement officers could ask dog owners to produce the means by which they intend to clean up after their pet, with those unable to facing a fine and potentially prosecution. It is believed DDC is the first Council in the country to consider the introduction of such an offence.



Bag it, bin it. If you can't you may be fined.

Councillors agreed at DDC's Strategy Group meeting last night to go ahead with a public consultation on the proposals. Beginning in mid-May, it will also ask people for their views on the possible introduction of an additional rule requiring dogs to be on leads in Daventry Country Park.

The Council currently enforces three dog control orders that make it an offence for people to fail to pick up after their dog, allow their dog into a designated children's play area and to fail to put their dog on a lead when directed to do so by a Council officer. Those rules would remain under the PSPO, to be joined by the new additional offences if agreed.

The proposals follow a number of initiatives in recent years to tackle the problem of dog fouling. These include the paint spraying initiative, under which volunteers are provided with cans of brightly-coloured paint to spray on dog mess, and the recent 'We're Watching You Campaign' featuring glow-in-the-dark posters to target night-time offenders.

Maria Taylor, Community Manager at Daventry District Council, said: "We receive more than 120 complaints about dog fouling each year but despite regular patrols it is difficult to catch offenders in the act.

“If agreed, the new order would give our Officers greater powers to catch the irresponsible minority of dog owners who go out with no intention of picking up after their pets.

“We believe we are the first council in the country to consider the introduction of such an offence. We are committed to tackling the issue of dog fouling and want to gain the public’s views on the matter before making a decision on whether these are the best ways.”.

CONVICTION POLITICS

Cllr Spencer Flower has become the first person to be charged and found guilty under the provisions of the Localism Act relating to the declaration of Disclosable Pecuniary Interests (DPIs). Cllr Flower was given a six-month conditional discharge and ordered to pay £930 in costs. The conditional discharge is the lowest penalty available to the judge.

Cllr Flower, formerly leader of Dorset County Council and councillor at East Dorset District Council (EDDC), was charged with being present and participating in voting at a meeting of EDDC about the East Dorset Core Strategy when he had a disclosable pecuniary interest in a matter considered at that meeting. The interest related to Cllr Flower’s non-executive directorship of Synergy Housing, which owned land in the area covered by the Core Strategy.

The judge noted that there appeared to be no evidence that Cllr Flower would benefit financially from the decisions he took part in. There was no evidence that Cllr Flower acted with intent to deceive. Cllr Flower was noted to be a man of good character and the court received a number of character references from people speaking highly of his abilities, his conscientiousness and his years of public service. In other words, the prosecution was based on a technicality as opposed to a wilful attempt to make personal gain.

The business related to the possible future development of a site owned by a company in which Cllr Flower had an interest.

The judge said that Cllr Flower could have sought advice prior to the meeting but that the onus remained on him to act in accordance with his authority’s Code of Conduct.

A CAUTIONARY TALE

Parish and town councils should be encouraged to be bold and aspirational, to do brilliant things for the communities they serve, to think big and get involved in grand schemes. However, councils should never embark on high profile projects without taking advice and making sure that everything is done carefully and properly according to the advice received. Otherwise they might end up like Dilwyn Parish Council in Herefordshire.

In 2012 Dilwyn Parish Council resolved to purchase the village pub at a cost of £250,000 in order to renovate it and re-open it for the community. It was an admirable and worthy venture.

However, a failure to observe basic governance guidelines and internal controls resulted in an Audit Commission investigation and the issuing

of a Report in the Public Interest. Issues included failure to obtain quotes for works in accordance with the council's financial regulations, and the clerk paying HMRC for VAT due from their personal account and then being reimbursed by the council. One of the most worrying issues identified was that of individual councillors making decisions on behalf of the council, including decisions to spend money, which is a clear breach of public trust.

The pub is still operating and the council appears to have learned some lessons. I still say that the council should be applauded for taking on the project in the first place; it's just a shame that when searching for Dilwyn Parish Council in Google the fourth hit is the Audit Commission Report!

<http://www.audit-commission.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/2015/03/HRF036-Dilwyn-Final-PIR-23-March-2015.pdf>



The Crown Inn at Dilwyn, Herefordshire. A brilliant community project, notwithstanding the lapses in governance and accountability

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 June – July 2015

Planning Nuts & Bolts

Mon, 08 Jun 2015 2:00pm

An introductory training session for Parish/Town Councillors and Clerks covering the basic principles of planning including policy, applications, appeals and enforcement. This two hour session will also include tips on increasing the effectiveness of the responses that Parish and Town Councils send through to local planning authorities and the opportunity to ask questions of an experienced planning consultant who has worked for local Councils, a volume house builder and a planning consultancy.

Openness and Accountability - Should Parish Council Bother?

Mon, 08 Jun 2015 7:00pm

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.

Off to a Flying Start

Mon, 15 Jun 2015 1:30pm

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.

How to be a Good Employer

Wed, 24 Jun 2015 10:00am

All parish and town councils are employers, even if they only have one part time employee – the clerk. This course looks at the council's obligations as an employer and will show councils how to get the best out of the employment relationship.

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

Titchmarsh Parish Council

The council has a vacancy for a Clerk and RFO. Titchmarsh is in East Northamptonshire in the picturesque countryside north east of Thrapston. The council has 468 electors and a 15/16 precept of £12,500. There are 9 councillors. The position is permanent part time at 25 hours per month at SCP18 - 25. The closing date for applications is 26 June 2015. The council also has need of an interim clerk whilst the recruitment/appointment is ongoing. If you are interested in a temporary position please contact dmoody@northantscalc.com for details.

Wootton, Wotton Fields & Simpson Manor Parish Council

Wootton, Wotton Fields & Simpson Manor Parish Council has a vacancy for a Clerk and RFO. The council, which lies just to the south of Northampton, is one of the successor councils to Wootton & East Hunsbury Parish Council, which was abolished on 1 April 2015 creating two new parish councils (the other being East Hunsbury Parish Council). The vacancy is for 30 hours per week at SCP 30. The council has just under 6,000 electors and operates the Wootton Community Centre. The closing date for applications is 19 June 2015.

(Note: Enquiries for the above positions will be responded to w/c 30 March 2015)

Northants CALC is also aware of upcoming vacancies in the west of South Northamptonshire. 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

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

Address:

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

Telephone: 01327 831482



www.northantscalc.com

Follow Northants CALC on



@ceo_ncalc