

# Update

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## THE CHIEF'S BRIEF

By Danny Moody, Chief Executive, Northants CALC

Most parish councils were created 130 years ago by the Local Government Act 1894. For a sector that is often misunderstood, misrepresented, and undervalued it certainly has been around a while! I think the secret is in the ability of a parish council to constantly evolve to match the needs of its residents. There are things that parish councils did in the 1890s that they don't do now, and things they do now that they didn't do then. An example is all the vital and brilliant work that parish councils are doing now on climate change. A handful of well-informed and proactive parish councils have been working on environmental issues for decades, but now almost all parish and town councils are responding to the issue in some way, little or large. This ability to reinvent and refocus means that parish councils maintain their relevance and importance, whatever the prevailing circumstances are.

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*“...the secret is in the ability of a parish council to constantly evolve to match the needs of its residents.”*

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The longevity and stability of the sector is also important in times of change and uncertainty.

Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) has changed the landscape of principal councils in Northamptonshire, but parish councils are still there. Voluntary and Community Sector bodies come and go, but parish councils are still there. Political control flips and flops, but parish councils are still there. When there is so much uncertainty in the world, parish and town councils are the anchors of their community – steadfast, constant, and ever-evolving.

One thing that parish and town councils have always been good at is leading community celebration, whether that means directly organising events and activities, or contributing financially to the events and activities organised by others. I have been very impressed by what the sector has pulled together for the Big Jubilee Weekend, and I wish every town, village, and hamlet in Northamptonshire a wonderful, wonderful weekend. From quintessentially English street parties to the more modern parties in the park with big screens, the weekend looks set to go off with a bang! Even the long-range weather forecast looks good (why oh why did I say that?!).

April and May are traditionally very busy months for parish and town councils. Every year there is the Annual Parish Meeting, the end of year return, and the annual meeting of the council including election of chair. Load on top of that the preparations for the Jubilee and the response to the Ukraine crisis and it is no wonder that many councils are feeling under stress. It is an important time to pull together as a council team – officers and members – to ensure that resources match workload, and to concentrate on what needs to be done, even if that means deferring some other things that are not so urgent or important.

Over the past two months we have started getting out and about a bit more. We have attended events and training sessions across the county, and it is good to see people, and even discover that new contacts that have hitherto been talking heads on the screen have legs and three dimensions! It is interesting that the past two years of home working have shown how effective and efficient it can be, and of course every in-person meeting has a significant time, carbon, and financial cost. Home working works well for a service-based organisation such as Northants CALC, and staff have become extremely adept and quick at hacking off small pieces of cheese from the fridge.

I reported in the last edition of *eUpdate* on the first year of operation of the unitary councils. Frustrations remain in both areas with the standard and timeliness of communications with officers and members of the unitary councils. We are in touch with North Northamptonshire Council (NNC) and West Northamptonshire Council (WNC) to highlight the issues and work on solutions. WNC has appointed an officer, Seb Greene, to explore the issues and I am indebted to the clerks that attended the recent focus groups with him to explore the issues in detail. A survey of all clerks ensued, which will be reported on in the coming months. And recently NNC engaged with us to hold a “Listening Event” with a selection of parish and town councils, which primarily focused on the Asset Mapping Project (AMP) and future devolution, but also explored the need for stronger partnership working between the tiers. There is much work to do to build a good working relationship and proper communications with the unitary councils, and there is some urgency too. The unitary councils must appreciate that parish and town councils are often reliant on good and timely communications from officers and members, and that when that doesn’t happen it builds frustration and causes reputational damage. Improvements need to be seen and I hope to provide a positive update in the next edition of *eUpdate*.

Remember that 2022 is our 75<sup>th</sup> Anniversary year and we are well into the planning for our Annual Conference to be held on Saturday 1 October 2022 at the Kettering Conference Centre. There are more details in an article below.

I end with my personal thanks to outgoing mayors and chairs who have led their councils over the past difficult year for their service and dedication to the community, and to the newly elected or re-elected mayors and chairs for taking on the office and the responsibility of leadership. We know that a good council is one with a good clerk, a good mayor or chair, and a strong team of councillors, all pulling together to do brilliant things for the community. When one leg is missing the stool becomes wobbly, so having a good mayor/chair is absolutely vital.

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

## THE YELLOW BOOK

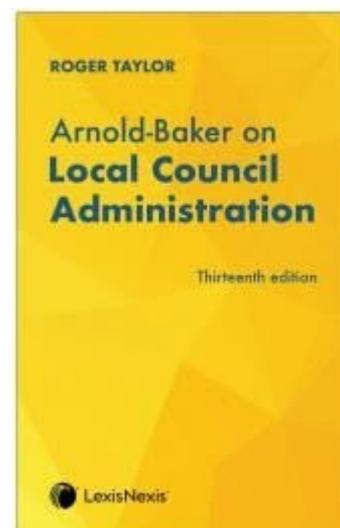
The 13<sup>th</sup> edition of *Arnold-Baker on Local Council Administration*, aka "Charles Arnold Baker", aka "The Yellow Book" is due to be published in the autumn and is available for pre-order from Lexis Nexis.

The list price is £164.99, which is a hefty price tag for a book which is almost two thirds re-printed legislation.

Northants CALC always negotiates a discount with Lexis Nexis, and discounts will be available from the National Association of Local Councils (NALC) and the Society of Local Council Clerks (SLCC) too. Northants CALC is expecting to negotiate a 20% discount plus free postage and packing, which takes the price down to £132, but that is still going to be out of reach for many councils.

Northants CALC has asked Lexis Nexis to issue a list of the changes between the 12<sup>th</sup> edition and the 13<sup>th</sup> edition, to help councils make their buying decision.

Meanwhile, Northants CALC has made representations to NALC that *Local Councils Explained*, which was widely regarded as a useful publication, was published in 2013 and is long-overdue an update. Watch this space!



## **THE PARISH PRECEPT 2022/23**

There are 10,239 local precepting bodies in England. Of these, 8,859 are parish and town councils that raised a precept in 2020/21. The remainder are mostly parish meetings that did not raise a precept.

In England, parish and town council precepts totalled £655 million in 2022/23, an increase of 6% on 2021/22. It represents 1.9% of the total council tax raised by local authorities.

The national totals and averages hide the enormous diversity in the sector. For example, the twenty highest-precepting town councils account for just over 7% of the total precept raised. Eleven of these have precepts higher than £2 million. Northampton Town Council (NTC) makes it into the top twenty for the first time (at No.20) with a precept for 2022/23 of £1,793,300. Note that 14 of the top twenty precepting councils are in unitary authority areas.

For all councils, Band D tax rates are 13.5% higher in unitary authority areas than in three-tier areas (parish/district/county).

The average Band D tax rate for all precepting councils in 2022/23 is £74.81, an increase of £2.95 or 4.1% over the previous year. Again, there is huge variation. The highest Band D set this year was by Falmouth Town Council in Cornwall, with a Band D tax rate of £377.97. The lowest Band D tax rate was £0.25!

In Northamptonshire there are 277 local precepting bodies, but of those 40 are financially inactive parish meetings (zero precept) and non-council bodies. The total raised by the 237 precepting bodies for 2022/23 is £18,122,308, an increase of £1,288,051 or 7.7%. The average Band D tax rate for 2022/23 is £77.37, an increase of £4.01 or 5.5%.

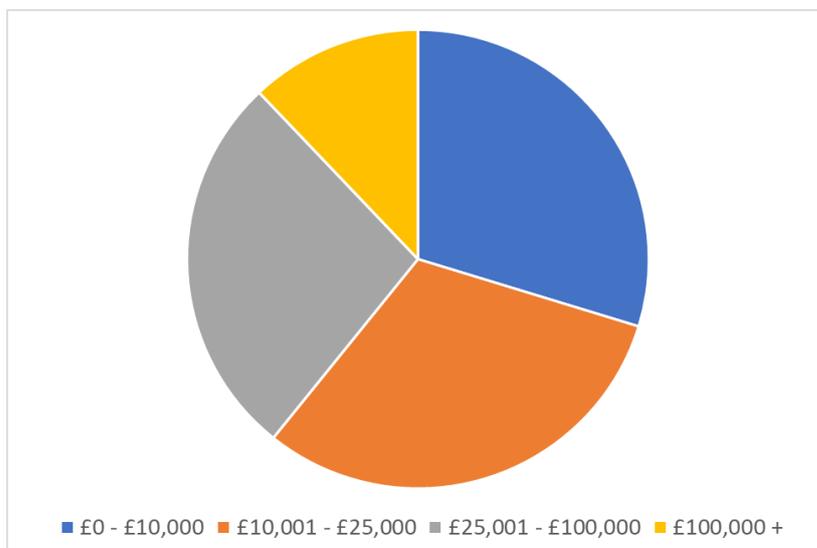
The highest precepting council is Northampton Town Council at £1,793,300. It is one of three councils in Northamptonshire in the millionaire's club, along with Daventry Town Council and Rushden Town Council. Northampton Town Council's Band D tax rate is £48.78.

The top ten precepting councils raise a total of £8,435,078 or 47% of the total for all councils. The average Band D tax rate for the top ten councils is £144.01.

The highest Band D tax rates in Northamptonshire are levied by Oundle Town Council (£232.09), West Haddon Parish Council (£221.50), and Lilbourne Parish Council (207.89).

The lowest precepting body is Catesby Parish Meeting, with a precept of just £90 and a Band D tax rate of £2.56!

Most precepting bodies in Northamptonshire have a very modest income. 68 councils (29%) have a precept of £10,000 or less and a further 70 councils (30%) have a precept between £10,001 and



£25,000. 63 councils (27%) have a precept between £25,001 and £100,000, and just 36 councils (15%) have a precept over £100,001.

There is a significant difference between the two unitary authority areas, due mainly to the fact that precepts in the former borough of Kettering (in North Northamptonshire) have been much lower than average in the past.

Unitary Area	Precepting Bodies	No Precept	Precept 21/22 (Precept 20/21)	Band D 21/22 (Band D 20/21)
North	96	10	£6,797,723 (£6,192,634)	£68.79 (£63.74)
West	141	24	£11,324,585 (£10,641,623)	£83.21 (£79.90)

The figures for the north will increase rapidly over the next few years as Corby Town Council, Kettering Town Council, Wellingborough Town Council, and the parish councils in the former district of Kettering gradually come into line with county and national averages. For example, if all those councils had the average Band D tax rate for councils in North Northamptonshire this year, the total precept would be £9,723,858 and the average Band D tax rate would be £72.51. It will also be interesting to see what effect inflation has on 2023/24 figures.

## SUPERFAST NORTHAMPTONSHIRE UPDATE

Article by Sarah Naylor, Superfast Northamptonshire Manager

### Progress Headlines - Telecoms providers

building Full Fibre and gigabit capable broadband networks are continuing to

extend coverage at a pace to homes and

businesses across Northamptonshire. At the end of April, over 78% of

Northamptonshire premises had access to gigabit capable broadband and over 44% were served by Full Fibre. This is a massive leap in just 6 years when we

consider in early 2016, only 1.7% of premises could take up gigabit or Full Fibre enabled services. We compare strongly to gigabit and Full Fibre coverage in

England which was 69% and 34% at the end of April, respectively.



Gigabit availability was boosted countywide in the summer of 2021 when Virgin Media uplifted its cable to a higher performance network. Openreach (urban/rural), CityFibre (urban) and Gigaclear Networks (rural) all have major commercial plans in the county for Full Fibre in the coming years.

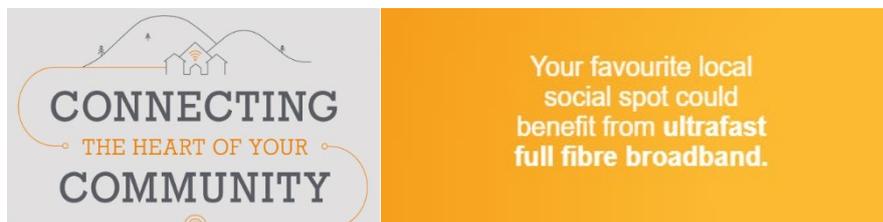
**Gigaclear Networks** have already brought Full Fibre to 36,000 rural premises in the county. They are continuing to deliver to some of the hardest to reach rural areas through the Superfast Northamptonshire project and commercially. Full Fibre services have recently gone live in parts of Blatherwyke, Deanshanger, Grafton Underwood, Flore, and Halse, whilst build is coming forward in Stanwick, Oundle and Blisworth as well as commercially in Thrapston. 38 villages are also benefitting from Gigaclear's Community Hub offer. This is providing free ultrafast connectivity for at least 12

months to provide new opportunities for how community facilities in villages served by

Gigaclear can be used.

This might be enabling virtual or hybrid parish council meetings (reducing the need to travel and enabling more people to participate), streaming film nights, supporting youth groups etc. If you know of a building which supports community activities in your Gigaclear village then you can find out more and how to apply at

[Community Hub | Gigaclear](#).



**Openreach** has announced 47 exchange areas to benefit from their Fibre First roll out. Whilst not all premises in these exchange areas will benefit from a Full Fibre upgrade commercially, this will still make a huge impact on coverage over the next few years. It includes over 80,000 homes and businesses in Northamptonshire and represents an investment of £63 million in the area. Areas already benefitting include Staverton, Welton, Kilsby, Greens Norton, and Earls Barton. Build is also coming forward in Cogenhoe, Crick, Daventry, Towcester, Rushden, and Roade amongst many other areas. You can see the list of exchanges on the Superfast Northamptonshire News page at [News \(superfastnorthamptonshire.net\)](https://www.superfastnorthamptonshire.net/news). You can view the Openreach Fibre First exchange map at [Where and when we're building Ultrafast Full Fibre broadband | Openreach](https://www.superfastnorthamptonshire.net/where-and-when-were-building-ultrafast-full-fibre-broadband-openreach). Also go to [Working with Openreach \(superfastnorthamptonshire.net\)](https://www.superfastnorthamptonshire.net/working-with-openreach)



**Project Gigabit** - Plans for the government's Project Gigabit continue to take shape. This will support connectivity to premises which are not expected to benefit from commercial plans. A Spring update from Building Digital UK (BDUK) is expected shortly. To find out more about Project Gigabit go to [Building Digital UK - Project Gigabit \(superfastnorthamptonshire.net\)](https://www.superfastnorthamptonshire.net/building-digital-uk-project-gigabit).

**Changes to the UK telephone network** are also continuing to progress with Openreach and other UK telecoms providers decommissioning the old copper network and moving customers over to all digital (Internet Protocol or IP). Most of the UK is expected to be digital by the end of 2025. This means landline voice calls will become Voice over Internet Protocol (VoIP) i.e. provided via broadband rather than analogue copper services. If you have any devices or systems at home or at work which currently run over copper telephone lines you need to check if they are IP compatible. This could be burglar alarms, personal healthcare pendants, and some CCTV or door entry systems etc. If you are dependent on your landline, ensure your service provider is aware of your needs when the time comes to switch. You can find out more about the digital switch at [UK Landline Digital Upgrade \(superfastnorthamptonshire.net\)](https://www.superfastnorthamptonshire.net/uk-landline-digital-upgrade).

**Broadband Survey Coming Soon** - Superfast Northamptonshire will soon be launching home and business broadband surveys to find out more about your broadband experiences and levels of demand in the county. This will be helpful to

inform potential future interventions. If you would like to be notified when the survey goes live, please email the team at [bigidea.ncc@northnorthants.gov.uk](mailto:bigidea.ncc@northnorthants.gov.uk).

**Super Slow broadband? Let Us Know!** If you have a very poor internet connection (speeds of less than 10Mbps) then we want to hear from you. Please let us know by emailing the Superfast Northamptonshire team at [bigidea.ncc@northnorthants.gov.uk](mailto:bigidea.ncc@northnorthants.gov.uk). Around 0.4% of premises across the county are thought to have access to such super slow speeds. As local authorities do not have access to commercial data, it is difficult for us to easily identify where these premises are. You can find out the estimated line speeds available at your property by going to the Openreach checker at <https://www.broadbandchecker.btwholesale.com/#/ADSL>. Other network coverage by [CityFibre](#), [VirginMedia](#), or [Gigaclear](#) may be available.

**For more information** about broadband in North and West Northamptonshire go to [www.superfastnorthamptonshire.net](http://www.superfastnorthamptonshire.net). You can follow us on Twitter [@SFastNorthants](https://twitter.com/SFastNorthants) or contact the Superfast Northamptonshire team with any enquiries at [bigidea.ncc@northnorthants.gov.uk](mailto:bigidea.ncc@northnorthants.gov.uk).



## **COUNCIL NUMBERS ARE NOT SET IN STONE**

The minimum number of seats a parish or town council can have is five. There is no maximum; the largest parish or town council in Northamptonshire is Northampton Town Council, which has twenty-five seats.

There is no formula for calculating the number of seats on a council. For many councils, the number of seats was set when they were created and haven't changed in over a hundred years.

The Boundary Commissions are constantly reviewing principal council wards and parliamentary constituencies to ensure that each elected representative has approximately the same number of electors in their area, but there is no such facility extended to parish and town councils. For example, in the civil parish of

Northampton there are 3,608 electors per town councillor but in the civil parish of Brampton Ash there is one councillor for every 12.6 electors!

There are lots of anomalies too. For example, Barton Seagrave Parish Council with 5,134 electors has eight seats, as does Duddington-with-Fineshade Parish Council, which has just 159 electors. Yardley Hastings Parish Council, with 611 electors, has eleven seats, the same as Upton Parish Council, which has 5,192 electors.

So what happens if a parish or town council wishes to change the number of seats it has; up or down? The process is called a Community Governance Review (CGR), which is a statutory consultative process run by the relevant principal council (so NNC or WNC depending on which area it is). A parish or town council can submit a proposal under a CGR to change the number of seats, and if the proposal is supported by the principal council the consequential change is given effect at the next ordinary election.

Other changes that can be considered via a CGR include the alteration of boundaries of existing parishes, the creation or abolition of a parish council, changing a parish council to a parish meeting (or vice versa), and grouping two or more parish councils together.

The Local Government Boundary Commission for England (LGBCE) is undertaking a review of the unitary councils' ward boundaries. Public consultation will start in August 2022 for West Northamptonshire ([see full timetable](#)), and North Northamptonshire is expected to follow a similar timeline. The reviews will conclude by autumn 2023 and any changes will come into effect at the local elections in May 2025.

Northants CALC has met with both unitary councils and requested that they conduct whole-area CGRs commencing in late 2023, when the LGBCE reviews are concluded. A CGR can take up to a year to complete, so it needs to start in late 2023 and finish by late 2024 so that changes can be given effect at the local elections in May 2025. This will be a very important opportunity for parish and town councils to deal with some of those anomalies and ensure that appropriate governance arrangements are put in place for the next decades. Member parish and town councils will be issued with full guidance and support in due course.

## OUR 75<sup>TH</sup> BIRTHDAY PARTY!

Northants CALC is 75 years old on 20 September 2022 (just the Association, not any of its staff!). Our 75th Annual Conference will be held on **Saturday 1 October 2022** at the Kettering Conference Centre and to celebrate the anniversary it will be expanded from the normal 3-hour event to a 5½-hour event with lunch included.



We surveyed the Councillor Panel initially and then all member councils to ask what topics and content the conference should have, and we used the results to design what we hope will be a fantastic event.

The doors will open at 0915 for hot bacon rolls on arrival and delegate registration. The Conference will open at 1000 and there will be sessions in the morning on Northants CALC's past, present, and future, Neighbourhood Planning, and Community Safety & Policing. Lunch will be from 1215 to 1330 to allow plenty of time for delegates to network and to meet the exhibitors. There will also be One2One surgeries running during lunchtime for delegates to bring their questions to. In the afternoon there will be a Question Time panel debate and a keynote address on climate change from Edmund Gemmel who inspired the Northamptonshire Larger Councils Partnership (NLCP) members so much last year. The conference will close at 1535 and delegates will be sent away with a goodie bag which will include a slice of our 75<sup>th</sup> birthday cake!

Numbers are strictly limited to 150, so be ready to act as soon as bookings open in July! Member councils are invited to send up to two delegates each, so it might be worth deciding who those will be now, so you are ready to book.

There is a huge amount to do to deliver this event for you, but we promise you that it will be a great day and that it will deliver real value and interest for your council. We ask that delegates commit to being with us for the whole time; we won't be locking the doors at 1000 but it is a whole day event, and it is important to us that everyone stays until 1535 (you'll be very glad you did 😊!).

## PARISH ONLINE DIGITAL MAPPING

Northants CALC partnered with Parish Online for the Asset Mapping Project (AMP) recently, and it created quite a buzz! We have

been working with Parish Online for over a decade, but AMP highlighted to parish and town councils just what a powerful tool it is, and how useful it can be.



Parish Online is an essential tool for viewing and printing maps, all the way to storing asset registers, producing neighbourhood plans and engaging with the public.

Responding to the surge of interest, Parish Online is putting on **two free online sessions** for Northants CALC in June, one aimed at beginners, and one aimed at those that have made a start, perhaps through AMP, and what to move to the next stage:

### **Parish Mapping - Beginners Workshop 14 June 2022 10:00-11:30**

<https://www.northantscalc.com/parish-mapping-beginners-worksho.html>.

The morning session is aimed at councils that have not used online mapping tools before to learn all about the features and benefits of mapping tools, with practical demonstrations using real-world examples. Attendees will see the Parish Online system in operation and learn how it could support their council's work.

### **Parish Mapping - Next Steps Workshop 14 June 2022 13:00-14:30**

<https://www.northantscalc.com/parish-mapping-next-steps-work.html>

The afternoon session is aimed at councils that have registered with Parish Online already and want to know how to get the most out of the system. Perhaps the council signed up a while ago but hasn't yet learnt how to maximise the system to best advantage. Perhaps whoever in the council that uses the system has "How do I...?" questions.

Northants CALC is indebted to Parish Online for their support throughout the Asset Mapping Project and for putting on these free sessions for our member parish and town councils.

## **AUTOMATIC ENROLMENT - WORKPLACE PENSION DUTIES**

Under the Pensions Act 2008, every employer in the UK must put qualifying staff into a workplace pension scheme and contribute towards it. This is called 'automatic enrolment'. Parish and town councils are employers and have certain legal duties related to automatic enrolment.

Every three years councils must put qualifying staff who have left the council's pension scheme back into it. This is called re-enrolment. Depending on the council's circumstances, re-enrolment and re-declaration may be a two-stage process.

On the third anniversary of the council's duties start date or "staging date" the council should assess staff who have left its scheme to see if they meet the age and earnings criteria to be re-enrolled. If they do meet the criteria, the council needs to put them back into the pension scheme. The council will also need to increase the contributions for any staff who are paying below the minimum contribution levels.

Once this is done, the council must write to these staff to tell them what is happening. Finally, it's the council's legal duty to complete a re-declaration of compliance to tell the Pensions Regulator how it has met its re-enrolment duties, whether it had anyone to put back into the scheme or not. This is the second stage of the process.

Councils should use the [re-enrolment duties tool](#) on The Pensions Regulator website to find out what they need to do.

Whether a council has staff to put back into its scheme or not, it must complete a re-declaration of compliance to tell the Pensions Regulator how it has met its duties. Remember, re-enrolment and re-declaration are the council's legal duties and [if it doesn't act it could be fined](#).

### **Step-by-step actions:**

1. To find out when the council needs to re-enrol, it will need its letter code which can be obtained by entering the PAYE accounts office reference and PAYE reference at

<https://automation.thepensionsregulator.gov.uk/LetterCode>.

2. Once you have the letter code you can see the council's next re-enrolment date at <https://www.thepensionsregulator.gov.uk/en/employers/re-enrolment/i-am-or-will-be-an-employer-with-staff-to-put-back-into-my-scheme/check-that-you-have-staff-to-put-back-into-your-pension-scheme/find-out-your-dates-for-re-enrolment>.
3. Then go to the re-enrolment page if there is a requirement to re-enrol at this time: <https://www.autoenrol.tpr.gov.uk/TPRGateway/Home>.

The Pensions Regulator website has lots of information to help employers, and NALC Legal Topic Note 79 (available from Northants CALC) also covers Staff Pensions.

Councils should consider taking appropriate advice from an Independent Financial Advisor before making decisions regarding pension products.

## **LEAVE ENTITLEMENT FOR PART TIME WORKERS**

The fulltime local government week is 37 hours. That's 7.4 hours per day, 5 days per week. All workers in the UK have a statutory entitlement to 28 "days" annual leave per year (which includes bank holidays), and clerks employed under the National Agreement (which most are) are entitled to 31 "days", rising to 36 "days" after 5 years' service.



So for example, if someone with less than 5 years' service is paid for 37 hours / 5 days per week then they will "work" for (5 days x 52 weeks) – 31 days = 229 days per year. On the other 31 days they are on "holiday".

For fulltime workers, the concept of annual leave is relatively straightforward, but for part time workers it starts to breakdown, and the more part time the worker is, the less sense annual leave makes.

Remember that ALL workers, including part time workers, are entitled to annual leave. And they are entitled to the same as fulltime workers, pro rata. For example, a parish clerk working 5 hours per week is still entitled to 31 “days”, but their “day” is 5/37ths of a fulltime worker’s day.

For most part time workers the only logical approach is to annualise the hours. A clerk contracted for 5 hours per week and entitled to 31 “days” (pro rata) annual leave, is essentially contracted for 5 hours x 52 weeks = 260 hours per year, of which 229.4 hours is “work” and 31 hours is “holiday”.

It is (too) common for clerks to work more than their contracted hours, so a clerk contracted for 5 hours per week, may work for 7, 10, or even more hours per week. There have been Employment Tribunal cases where claims have been made that holiday entitlement should be based on actual hours, rather than contracted hours. A clerk contracted for 5 hours per week is entitled to 36 minutes of holiday per week... most clerks wouldn’t notice!

However, it gets worse. Most councils only have one employee; the clerk. So when the clerk is on “holiday” (you can’t get very far in 36 minutes!) there is no one to do their work when they are away, so there is an extra workload before a holiday making sure everything is done that would need to be done in the time away, and extra workload on their return catching up and trying to get back on top of things.

The most important thing is that councils understand that if they pay someone for 5 hours per week, they are getting 4.4 hours of “work” and the balance, 0.6 hours, is the clerks paid leave. Too often councils calculate how many hours “work” there is and contracts a clerk for that number of hours, forgetting the statutory leave entitlement (and often not making provision for sickness absence, and other leave such as parental leave, carer’s leave, and compassionate leave).

Councils must provide for adequate staff hours making sure that annual leave entitlement has been considered. Otherwise it is a ticking timebomb of dissatisfaction, low morale, burnout, and ultimately staff turnover.

Northants CALC has developed a handy spreadsheet for calculating leave entitlement for part time staff. If you need a copy, pop an email to [info@northantscalc.com](mailto:info@northantscalc.com).

## MATERIAL CONSIDERATIONS

Parish and town councils are consulted on planning applications in their area. It is a power offered to parish and town councils under Schedule 1, paragraph 8 of the Town & Country Planning Act 1990. The power to comment on planning applications rests with the council originally but is often delegated to an executive committee, which can meet as frequently or infrequently as the number of applications dictates.



Comments on a planning application made by a parish or town council or its planning committee must be based on “material considerations,” that is “*a matter that should be taken into account in deciding a planning application or on an appeal against a planning decision*”.

Examples of material considerations are loss of privacy, highway safety, and noise. Examples of things that are not material considerations are loss of view, and the identity of the applicant and/or developer. A list can be found at <https://www.planningportal.co.uk/services/help/faq/planning/about-the-planning-system/what-are-material-considerations>.

Comments made by parish and town councils are sent to the Local Planning Authority (LPA), which is North Northamptonshire Council (NNC) or West Northamptonshire Council (WNC). The comments are published on the LPA’s web site.

When the case officer receives the comments, they need to be able to determine quickly whether the comments support the application, or object to it. This should be very clearly stated. Generally speaking every response should either support or object. If the parish or town council submits a comment “no objection” it has the same effect as if no comments had been submitted. The case officer has an imaginary set of scales, comments of support go on one side, objections go on the other. “No objection” goes in the middle, so doesn’t affect the outcome at all.

It is good practice to include the reason for supporting or objecting to a planning application, based on material considerations. For example, “RESOLVED: To object to the application on the grounds that the proposed development will overshadow the adjacent property at 4 Main Street”, or “RESOLVED: To support the application, which is in conformity with paragraph 4.2.3 of the Neighbourhood Plan for Great Pipping”. If sound material considerations are given with the comments of support or objection, they will be given more “weight” in the determination of the planning application.

Comments of support can be absolute or caveated. For example, a parish or town council might support an application but ask for details of the proposed development to be reconsidered and changed before it is granted permission.

Similarly with objections, they can be absolute (the proposed development could never be acceptable) or caveated with a suggested action that could be taken to address the objection, such as amending the proposal or attaching planning conditions or a planning obligation to mitigate the impact.

Ideally comments should refer to the Neighbourhood Plan (if there is one) and/or to the Local Plan. List plan policies that support the comments and explain why. Recognise and respond to Local Plan policies that conflict with the comments. Explain what other planning issues you believe should affect the decision.

Comments can be strengthened by considering the public interest. Explain how the proposed development affects the local community as a whole. Avoid focusing on issues such as land ownership, the effects of the proposal on the value of neighbouring property, or the personal circumstances of the applicant.

Be clear and courteous, avoid personal issues, and concentrate on the facts of the case. Separate out each point you want to make. Explain what you want to happen and, where appropriate, suggest conditions you want to see put on the application to improve the sustainability of the proposal. Try to be concise.

High quality comments will be considered more seriously, and your council will gain a reputation with the LPA’s planning officers as a council that should be listened to. Conversely, if your council rarely responds to applications, always asks for more time to respond, and often submits comments that are not based on material consideration, you will gain a different sort of reputation!

## LOCAL ELECTRIC VEHICLE INFRASTRUCTURE

The government has published “*Taking charge: the electric vehicle infrastructure strategy*,” the stated aim of which is that “*Everyone can find and access reliable public chargepoints wherever they live – be that city centre or rural village...*”

The introduction says that “*In December 2021, over a quarter of all new cars sold in the UK were battery electric vehicles. The equivalent figure for 2019 was less than 2%... The UK recognises that a focus on vehicles is only half of the challenge. A world-class charging infrastructure is absolutely fundamental to delivering net zero road transport. This document sets out our strategic approach in delivering this charging infrastructure out to 2030. The vast majority of drivers will do most of their charging at home, overnight. We need public chargepoints for two main purposes: to enable long distance journeys, and to support those without off-street parking.*”



The vision is that by 2030 “*We will remove charging infrastructure as both a perceived, and a real, barrier to the adoption of electric vehicles (EVs). EV charging should be cheaper and more convenient than refuelling at a petrol station. Specific predictions of the future mix and number of chargepoints are inherently uncertain in 2022 due to rapid developments in battery and charging technology, and because consumer preferences about where and when they would like to charge are still being revealed. The commercial landscape for charging infrastructure is also developing quickly but the balance between fewer, higher-powered chargers and more numerous, lower-powered ones is not yet clear. By 2030, we expect there to be around 300,000 public chargepoints as a minimum in the UK, but there could potentially be more than double that number*”.

Parish and town councils, working in partnership with the unitary councils, could have a big role to play in making Electric Vehicle Charging Points (EVCPs) available to all. To read the full strategy please see <https://bit.ly/3z1OdJQ>.

## SITUATIONS VACANT

Please see <https://www.northantscalc.com/council-vacancies.html> for details of all the below vacancies.

### Moulton Parish Council

Moulton lies approximately 7 miles north of Northampton. There are just over 3,900 electors and the 14-seat council set a precept for 2022/23 of £363,000. Moulton Parish Council has a vacancy for an Administrator working up to 30 hours per week. The closing date for applications is **27 May 2022**.



### Cold Ashby Parish Council

Cold Ashby lies approximately 15 miles north of Northampton. There are just over 220 electors and the 7-seat council set a precept for 2022/23 of £10,000. Cold Ashby Parish Council has a vacancy for a Parish Clerk working 20 hours per month. The closing date for applications is 5pm on **3 June 2022**.

### Middleton Cheney Parish Council

Middleton Cheney lies approximately 27 miles south of Northampton. There are just over 3,020 electors and the 12-seat council set a precept for 2022/23 of £136,680. Middleton Cheney Parish Council has a vacancy for a Parish Clerk working 25 hours per week. The closing date for applications is **6 June 2022**.

### Little Harrowden Parish Council

Little Harrowden is a village and civil parish in North Northamptonshire nearly three miles north-west of Wellingborough, off the A509 Road. The Parish Council has a precept of £23,500 with an electorate of just over 740 people. Little Harrowden Parish Council has a vacancy for a Parish Clerk/Responsible Finance Officer. The closing date for applications is **10 June 2022**.

We are aware of further vacancies arising soon as well as two councils that might be looking for locum clerk cover. If you are a clerk in Northamptonshire and you would like to take on an additional council or extra hours, please contact Danny Moody at Northants CALC to discuss suitable opportunities.

## A CAUTIONARY TALE

There are lots of rules and regulations pertaining to parish and town councils, but very often a council's success relies simply on the people involved (the officers and members) acting like reasonable and rational grown-ups.

There are a wide variety of views on the role of politics in the parish and town council sector. Membership of a political party can be the glue that holds a councillor team together, but it can also be divisive and distracting.

Where it gets really bad is when politically motivated parish and town councillors use the council as a forum for grandstanding and point-scoring. A parish or town council is there to do good things for its community regardless of the political persuasion of its members and it is quite rare for a difference in political ethos to be a factor, with perhaps the one crucial exception of setting the precept (low tax/high tax).

Parish and town councils are constitutionally apolitical. The law that applies to principal councils to cater for politics, such as the fair political balance of committees, does not apply to parish and town councils. Nor is there any legal provision for "Leaders" of parish or town councils. Where the majority political group on a parish or town council identifies a Leader, it is important for everyone involved, particularly the officers, to remember that the person is not the "Leader of the Council," they are the "Leader of the [party] group on the Council." Such a person can be an extremely important sounding board for the Clerk, but they have no more or less power than any other councillor.

When politics gets in the way, things can unravel quite quickly. It manifests in member and staff resignations, complaints under the Code of Conduct – and associated counter-complaints, an inordinate (and sometimes obscene) amount of time, money, and effort being spent on internal investigations and reviews, and eventually the presence of a "Get the Council Out" campaign group when residents have finally had enough.

"Have you got any examples?," I hear you ask! Never in Northamptonshire of course (perish the thought) but have a look at a report prepared by the Bingham Town Council Improvement Board here <https://bit.ly/3LOAc4M>, and associated Nottinghamshire press coverage here <https://bit.ly/3MSst7h>.

## **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. See <https://www.northantscalc.com/events.html> for full course details.

### **VAT for unregistered councils (VAT126) \*\*\*NEW\*\*\***

Wed, 04 May 2022 10:00

For clerks, finance staff and councillors from councils that are not VAT registered but reclaim VAT on Form VAT126.

### **Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) and S106 - FULLY BOOKED**

Thu, 05 May 2022 19:00

Section 106 and Community Infrastructure Levy – a session for Parish/Town Councillors covering the existing Section 106 agreements regime and providing an introduction to the Community Infrastructure Levy. The training will include a section of ensuring that the requests for financial and other contributions that Parish and Town Councils submit are as persuasive as they can be.

### **Data Protection for Councillors**

Mon, 09 May 2022 19:00

Whether you are an experienced Councillor or have only recently been elected, it is vital that you understand how data protection fits with your role as an elected member. With legislation and case law evolving, this interactive session will provide you with an opportunity to make sure you are getting the essentials right and ensure you are meeting your legal obligations as a Councillor.

### **Off to a Flying Start**

Thu, 12 May 2022 10:00

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. Key areas covered include: Roles and responsibilities within the Council, Powers and duties, General Power of Competence, Elections, Different types of meetings, Community engagement, and Finance.

### **Finance for Councillors**

Wed, 18 May 2022 18:30

This session is designed to give councillors a greater understanding of their duties with regard to the council's finances. Topics include: Roles and responsibilities, setting a budget and precept, financial control and more.

### **Transparency for councils under £25,000 \*\*\*NEW\*\*\***

Thu, 19 May 2022 10:00

This session introduces the concepts of transparency and the publication of information, showing how it links to and overlaps audit requirements. Topics include: Audit exemption for councils under £25,000, Publication schemes, The public's rights, and The Annual Return.

### **Creating a social media strategy for your council \*\*\*NEW\*\*\***

Thu, 19 May 2022 11:00

Social media provides town and parish Councils a unique opportunity to significantly enhance their communications – yet few Councils are fully reaping the benefits on offer. Moreover, few councils have a clear social media strategy in place. This comprehensive course looks at how to build a social media strategy that seeks to promote your services and key council priorities.

### **Data Protection for Clerks & Officers**

Fri, 20 May 2022 10:00

In an ever-evolving legislative landscape, it is vital that Councils ensure they have the most up-to-date understanding of their data protection and related obligations. This session walks Councils through the principles of GDPR and related legislation including PECR, what it means in practical terms and the systems and processes Councils should have in place to ensure they are working towards sustainable compliance.

### **Building an effective council communications strategy \*\*\*NEW\*\*\***

Fri, 20 May 2022 12:30

Everything should start with a strategy – and good communication is no different. To get the most from an increasing range of communications platforms and tools, it's vital that your Council has a strategy that supports the delivery of your Council's existing aims and objectives. We walk you through best practice for creating an effective communications strategy that fits with the needs and aspirations of your Council, whilst making best use of communication channels.

## **VAT for VAT registered councils \*\*\*NEW\*\*\***

Thu, 26 May 2022 10:00

For clerks, finance staff and councillors from councils that are VAT registered, who wish to develop their knowledge (VAT registered councils have a 9-digit registration number, submit quarterly VAT returns online and charge VAT on taxable sales. If your council submits a VAT126 claim, it is not VAT registered).

## **Managing difficult people and conversations**

Thu, 26 May 2022 14:00

Managing professional relationships effectively is important, and this is particularly true for Clerks and local council officers. Yet whether it's with other officers or with councillors, sometimes difficult situations will present themselves, and it's vital to have the skills to manage the challenges. This session for local council officers explores practical techniques and ideas to manage difficult relationships in a council environment.

For more information on any of the courses above, and to see all the training opportunities you have from June 2022 onwards, please visit

<https://www.northantscalc.com/events.html>.

## **COUNCILLOR DEVELOPMENT FRAMEWORK**

The **Councillor Development Framework (CDF)** was launched in May 2021. The CDF was designed following feedback from clerks and councillors who were not sure what training was required or what should be prioritised. See

<https://www.northantscalc.com/councillor-development-framework.html>.

## **COMMUNITY CARBON CALCULATOR**

Northants is assembling resources on climate change on our web site at <https://www.northantscalc.com/climate.html>. If you have anything that you think would be useful for other parish and town councils, please send it to us to add to the web page.



The Centre for Sustainable Energy has written a blog for the National Association of Local Councils (NALC) about its new Impact Community Carbon Calculator tool. It provides a good basis for understanding local emissions, can be used as an engagement tool, and helps focus efforts on the big-emission areas. See <https://bit.ly/38kaRIA>.

## NORTHANTS CALC CONTACTS

**Danny Moody**

Chief Executive

[dmoody@northantscalc.com](mailto:dmoody@northantscalc.com)

Twitter: [@ceo\\_ncalc](https://twitter.com/ceo_ncalc)

**Lesley Sambrook Smith**

Deputy Chief Executive

[lsambrooksmith@northantscalc.com](mailto:lsambrooksmith@northantscalc.com)

Twitter: [@deputyceo\\_ncalc](https://twitter.com/deputyceo_ncalc)

**Marie Reilly**

Training Manager

[mreilly@northantscalc.com](mailto:mreilly@northantscalc.com)

**Sophie Harding**

Business Support Manager

[sharding@northantscalc.com](mailto:sharding@northantscalc.com)

**General enquiries**

[info@northantscalc.com](mailto:info@northantscalc.com)

**Member Enquiry Service (MES)**

[mes@northantscalc.com](mailto:mes@northantscalc.com)

**Data Protection Officer Service**

[dpo@northantscalc.com](mailto:dpo@northantscalc.com)

**Telephone**

01327 831482

**Address:**

Northants CALC  
PO Box 7936  
Brackley  
NN13 9BY

**Web:**

[www.northantscalc.com](http://www.northantscalc.com)

