

# Update

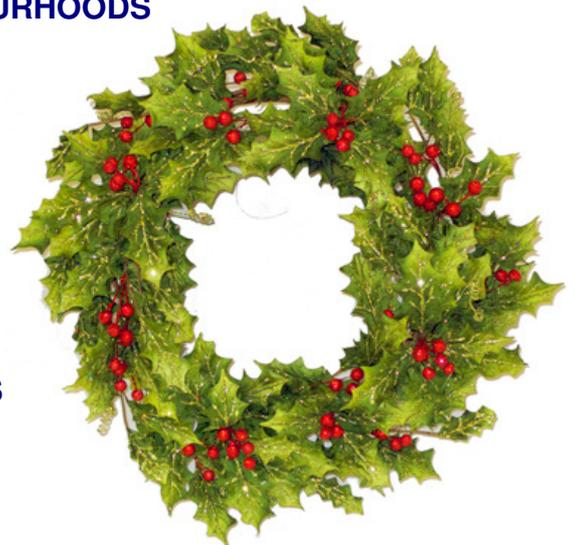
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## THE CHIEF'S BRIEF

By Danny Moody, Chief Executive, Northants CALC

It scarcely seems possible that the curtain is about to come down on another year. The saying "*Time flies by when you're having fun*" suggests that it has been one of the most fun years ever! Certainly the last eight weeks have been some of the busiest that I can ever remember, and our challenge of course is to ensure that "busy" means "productive" and "effective".

I am not a subscriber to the notion that "*this is a critical time for parish and town councils*" or that "*we live in an unprecedented time of change for parish councils*". I think it was ever thus. Imagine what it must have been like in the early 1970s during local government reorganisation, or more recently in the early 1990s during the poll tax riots. Undoubtedly there is a lot on the parish council plate currently but one of the strengths of our sector is adapting to change and surviving. No other tier of local government can boast a history that stretches back into the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

October saw not one, but two key Annual General Meetings. The Northants CALC AGM was held on 18 October (report below) at which member councils made critical decisions about the governance and staffing of the Association, and the National Association of Local Councils (NALC) AGM was held on 29 October at which Northants CALC had an important motion to clarify the NALC constitution. Those two meetings dominated our work during October.

One of the happy spin-offs of preparing for the Northants CALC AGM was the offer that was made to all member councils to visit a council meeting to talk about the membership fee structure for 2015/16. It was my pleasure to attend meetings from Croughton in the west to Broughton in the east and from Desborough in the north to Weston & Weedon Lois in the south. It is always good to visit councils and talk about local issues. I am constantly impressed by how much parish and town councils do for their community and how hard working councillors and clerks are for the benefit of their communities. A visit to Weedon Bec Parish Council reminded me just what hard work and dedication is required to deliver a Neighbourhood Plan but that where a council has a knowledgeable clerk, a passionate chairman and a dedicated councillor team almost anything can be achieved.

On 6 October I organised a meeting for all of the parish and town councils in the borough of Kettering. The meeting was held in Wilbarston (thanks to Nick Richards and Wilbarston Parish Council) and there was a really good attendance from across the borough. The purpose of the meeting, which was titled “*Kettering Parishes: A 2020 Vision*” was to look at the relationship between parish and town councils and Kettering Borough Council (KBC) and to look at how parish and town councils need to develop over the next 6 years. It was the start of a process but has already resulted in small positive changes, with further strategic changes to be considered in the New Year.

Another initiative aimed at improving communications is the Northampton Borough Clerks’ Forum, the inaugural meeting of which was held on 5 November. The Forum was pushed for by Tina Charteress, who is clerk to parish councils in



*Local government is a people-business. It relies on effective communication.*

Northampton but also in South Northamptonshire, where a similar Forum was created last year. It seems clear that there is definitely a place for officer to officer meetings that are focused on technical and operational issues. The latest Clerk’s Forum in South Northants was held on 27 November and there was a really good turn out and some excellent discussion.

Also in October I attended the Society of Local Council Clerks (SLCC) National Conference held this year in Bristol from 9 – 11 October. The SLCC has an excellent events management team and the conference front-man is Richard Walden who always adds a gloss of professionalism to proceedings. I would recommend that all councils support their clerks to be members of the SLCC and attend their events. The National Conference was a very useful catch-up on all the latest sector developments affecting parish and town councils and the event was closed with a poignant motivational speech from Marine Captain Jon White (retired) who in 2010 stepped on an IED in Afghanistan losing both legs and an arm as a result. It sure puts local government issues into perspective hearing a story like Jon’s ([www.thewhitehousefuture.co.uk](http://www.thewhitehousefuture.co.uk)).

If 2014 has been a significant year, 2015 promises to be even more important with the local and general elections in May 2015. In this issue of *eUpdate* we'll take a special look at parish elections with lots of information, tips and ideas about how to encourage a contested election in your parish. Please let me have your feedback, comments and suggestions.

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

## **DELIVERING DIFFERENTLY IN NEIGHBOURHOODS**

The Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) has recently launched Delivering Differently in Neighbourhoods, a new programme which aims to support principal authorities to redesign services to deliver at neighbourhood level, with the involvement of community organisations or parish councils.



The department is offering direct grants to around 25 local authorities in total to kick-start innovative projects in 2014/15 and 2015/16. An expert panel will provide advice and challenge, and there will be opportunities for different projects to exchange learning and network.

DCLG are interested in projects that seek to devolve greater responsibility to parish and town councils, and expect that a minimum of 3-4 projects funded in each of the two phases of the programme will involve parish and town councils in some way.

DCLG encourages parish councils to discuss the programme with their local authorities, who will need to submit expressions of interest to [DDneighbourhoods@communities.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:DDneighbourhoods@communities.gsi.gov.uk) by **15 December 2015**.

For further information about the programme, please see:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/delivering-differently-in-neighbourhoods>

## THE 67<sup>TH</sup> NORTHANTS CALC AGM

Over sixty voting delegates attended the Association's AGM in Raunds. In all, approximately 100 attendees participated in the annual business and heard an illuminating keynote address from local government academic Professor Colin Copus (@ProfCopusLG) from De Montfort University on Localism and what it means for parish councils.

During the business items there was overwhelming support for a one-off structural change in membership fees from 2015. The Association's board had recommended a significant increase that would put the Association on a sound financial footing for the future and after a lively debate the motion was carried with 52 votes in favour, 7 against and 2 abstentions. An earlier amendment that the change be phased in over three years was heavily defeated. Chief Executive, Danny Moody, promised that the Association would work hard to deliver value for money and would listen to the smallest parishes to ensure that services were fit for purpose for all.

A motion from Deanshanger Parish Council that government be lobbied to "*protect all pubs from the threat of conversion to supermarkets, betting shops and pay-day loan stores by ensuring the need for planning permission and community consultation, which is not presently required under change of use legislation*" was carried unanimously with a suggestion that similar protection be sought for community post offices and banks.



Two directors, Kath Bonner Dunham and Gwen Radcliffe, retired from the board at the

AGM and a presentation was made to Gwen in appreciation for her nearly thirty years of service to the Association. The AGM also elected her as a new Vice President. The two directors joining the board to fill the vacancies are Linda Carter from Brackley Town Council and Lynn Lavender from Duston Parish Council.

The Came & Co Northamptonshire Council of the Year 2014 award went to Brackley Town Council for its WWI centenary commemoration project, which included the cleaning of the community's war memorial, involving local children and conducting a trawl of the council's archives to find relevant information. A community service was held on 4 August 2014 in Brackley, which will go down as a special day in the history of the council and the community. The award was presented to Town Clerk, Linda Carter, by Vice President, Jeffrey Greenwell. A prize draw for a set of 640 Christmas lights donated by Blachere Illuminations was won by Billing Parish Council.

In his closing remarks Jeffrey Greenwell said "*This is your Association. It is run for you, the member councils. By attending this meeting you control the Association and today you have voted to make it a strong Association for the future*".

The AGM was generously supported by [Unity Trust Bank](#) (banking), [Came & Co.](#) (insurance), [2Commune](#) (web sites), [Blachere Illumination](#) (festive lighting), [CCLA](#) (investments), [Greenbarnes](#) (noticeboards) and [Ogilvie Engineering](#) (street furniture). Thank you to them all for the support.

Next year's AGM will take place on Saturday 17 October 2015 and all member councils are encouraged to attend. If you have your new diary already please put the date in it now!

## **EMERGENCY PLANNING STORIES**

Have you been involved in any emergency planning / community resilience projects or training or exercises that you would like to share with the rest of Northamptonshire? If so, why not consider sending an article for inclusion in the 2014/15 "VIVA" newsletter that goes out to all parishes and colleagues within the emergency planning world in Northamptonshire. Photos would be great to accompany your article. It will be great to share best practice around the county and pass on any valuable lessons. Please send your contributions by e-mail to Jo Maddams at [jmaddams@northamptonshire.gov.uk](mailto:jmaddams@northamptonshire.gov.uk) by 12 December 2014 for inclusion in this year's newsletter.

The 2013/14 edition of the "VIVA" newsletter is available to download at <http://www.northamptonshire.gov.uk/en/councilservices/fire/emergencies/pages/protecting-your-community.aspx>

## POWERING UP COMMUNITIES

The Urban Community Energy Fund (UCEF) is a £10m government fund to kick-start renewable energy generation projects in urban communities across England. Community groups will be able to access grants and loans to support renewable energy developments.

Grants of up to £20,000 are available for the more speculative, early stages of your project's development, such as public consultation and preliminary viability studies.

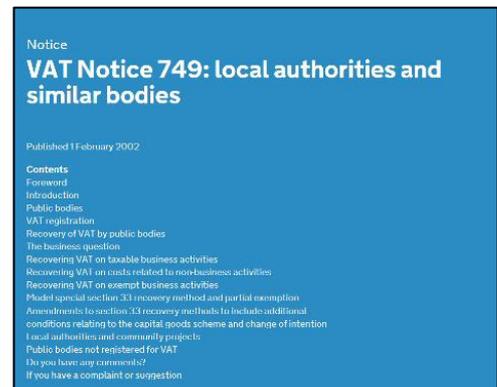
UCEF will also provide loans of up to £130,000 to develop planning applications and a robust business case to attract further investment. This will help your project become 'investment ready', that is, at the right stage to secure a bank loan or another form of investment.

The first round of applications has a deadline of 22 December 2014 but there will be further rounds throughout 2015.

Please see <https://www.gov.uk/urban-community-energy-fund> for further details.

## VAT RECLAIM DELAYS

A very small number of councils across the country are reporting delays in having VAT reclaims processed by HMRC. If you have experienced any delays please contact Northants CALC with details.



Under section 33 of the VAT Act 1994 parish or town councils can reclaim VAT incurred in their non-business activities, including most of the ordinary administrative and procedural activities. Such expenditure includes the purchase of stationery, telephone, copying and similar charges, office machinery, hire of meeting rooms, street lighting and maintenance of a council's own offices.

VAT may be reclaimable on certain other categories of expenditure but it is a horrendously complex system and councils are advised to seek guidance from Northants CALC at an early stage of project planning.

## **SALARY AWARD CONFIRMED**

After months of negotiation between the employers' and employees' sides of the National Joint Council for Local Government Services (NJC) an agreed salary award was announced on 14 November 2014.

Most clerks are employed according to the terms and conditions in the *National Agreement on Salaries and Conditions of Service of Local Council Clerks in England and Wales* (the "National Agreement"), which is negotiated between the two national sector bodies, the National Association of Local Councils (NALC) and the Society of Local Council Clerks (SLCC). The National Agreement is based on the NJC pay scales.

Heralded as a "2.2% pay increase", the increase applies from 1 January 2015 to 31 March 2016 so it represents another real terms cut when inflation is taken into account.

One off payments (£100 pro rata) apply in December 2014 for those on Spinal Column Points 15 – 49. There is also a smaller one-off payment in April 2015.

Full information including an Excel-based salary calculator has been sent to every member council.

## **CHRISTMAS LIGHTS & DECORATIONS**

A parish or town council wishing to attach Christmas lights (or anything else such as hanging baskets) to a lighting column owned by Northamptonshire County Council (NCC) must first obtain a licence.

Steve Lilley, from Northamptonshire Highways, says "*Any attachment to a lighting column can place heavy loads on it and cause unexpected failure. This may not be purely due to the weight of the attachment but will usually be due to extremely high transverse loads imposed on the column by wind or because a cable has been attached between two nearby columns. It is extremely important therefore that any organization responsible for the lighting knows exactly what is proposed to be attached, what loads that attachment will impose on the column and whether the column is structurally sound and able to carry those loads safely.*

*Unfortunately, if a column fails and hits an individual when it falls, the outcome is*

*likely to be a serious or fatal injury due to the height of the column. We have a duty of care towards everyone's safety and any such injury to an individual is likely to result in criminal charges."*

*"In most cases where attachments have been correctly licensed and the columns have been structurally tested, the test certificate is usually valid for 3 years and it does not take long to carry out although it does come at a cost."*

Debbie Taylor-Bond, Head of Highways & Transport at Northamptonshire Highways adds *"Amongst other things, the licence application will need to include evidence from the applicant that the streetlight is able to meet any loading associated with the attachment through an approved method of structural testing. It is a popular misconception that all street lighting columns can carry attachments, this is generally incorrect"*



Licence applications can be processed within a few days of receipt (subject to all of the necessary paperwork and structural testing being in order at the time the application is made) and whilst there is a cost to the applicant to carry out structural testing the County Council understands the local importance placed on being able to attach items such as Christmas lights and baskets within a local area and for this reason they do not currently charge for the issuing of the licence for this activity.

To apply for a licence now or at any other time in the year contact NCC Regulations for guidance at [ncc-regs@northamptonshire.gov.uk](mailto:ncc-regs@northamptonshire.gov.uk).

## **NEW POWERS GAINING TRACTION**

New powers available to parish and town councils as a result of the Localism Act are being taken up in ever greater numbers. The Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) announced on 11 November 2014 that more than 1,500 buildings, assets and green spaces are now listed as Assets of Community Value (ACVs) under the Community Right to Bid, and that 1,200 Neighbourhood Plans are underway.

Visit the My Community Rights web site at <http://mycommunityrights.org.uk>.

## **\*ELECTION SPECIAL\*ELECTION SPECIAL\*ELECTION SPECIAL\*ELECTION SPECIAL\*ELECTION SPECIAL\*ELECTION SPECIAL\*ELECTION SPECIAL\***

In May 2015 177 of Northamptonshire's 211 parish and town councils will be holding elections (the other 34 are in the district of Daventry and are on a different electoral cycle to the rest). Almost 1,500 council seats are up for grabs across the county in what might be a watershed election for the parish sector.

In 2011 there were just 22 contested elections at parish level – and some of those were in individual wards, not the whole council. It was an electoral performance to be embarrassed about and one that must not be repeated in 2015.

The Daventry parishes that held elections in May 2014 showed that not much has improved in recent times with only 3 of 17 elections contested.

An article in the [May/June eUpdate](#) analysed the Daventry elections and asked the question "*why is it important that parish councils have contested elections?*". This is a fundamental question because only when parish councils understand and agree that contested elections are absolutely essential to the health of parish councils will they put the effort in to ensuring, to the best of their ability, that contests take place. In this *eUpdate* we'll take a look at what councils can do to encourage candidacy and rekindle the democratic life-force of the council.

### **IF YOU DON'T DO IT, NO ONE ELSE WILL**

One might be forgiven for thinking that there is some national body somewhere that will ensure that your parish or town council election is contested. The Electoral Commission perhaps, or even the National Association of Local Councils (NALC). The (somewhat surprising) reality is that **no one** has been given the job of promoting candidacy at local elections. For principle councils the party political machinery ensures that most, if not all, seats are hotly contested, but the vast majority of parish and town councils are non-political and candidacy is not "organised". Parish councillors normally stand as communitarians, even if they hold strong political views personally.

It is therefore up to the parish council itself to grab the bull by the horns and take on responsibility for ensuring that the election is contested. And in a way that's a good thing, because there is no one better placed to encourage candidates than

the parish or town council itself. It can use community contacts and communication methods that no outside agency can access and it has the detailed knowledge of the community and how the council works to be able to answer any question a prospective candidate may have. The important thing is that the council as a body a) accepts the responsibility, b) formally gives the clerk permission to promote candidacy (to spare their professional embarrassment of actively encouraging people to stand against the current councillors) and c) allocates sufficient time and money to make it work.

## WHAT IS A CONTESTED ELECTION?

Councils have seats. The number of seats is set and can only be altered by a statutory process known as a Community Governance Review (CGR) (which takes more than a year to conduct, so it cannot be done by May 2015!). Every council must know, with absolute certainty, how many seats on the council there are. If there is any doubt whatsoever contact Northants CALC. There will be a contest if there are more candidates than seats. If there are the same number or fewer candidates than seats then those standing for election are **elected uncontested**. It is important to understand that they are still **elected**; it's just that they are elected uncontested.

Ideally an election will be strongly contested... at least 10 candidates for 7 seats, 12 candidates for 9 seats etc. The more candidates there are the greater the democratic legitimacy of those elected. It also helps those defeated if they weren't the only one to lose out!

## KNOW THE TIMETABLE & PROCESS

Whilst it is true that it can be a hard slog to encourage candidates to put themselves forward, it is an absolute travesty if the work is put in to find sufficient candidates to have a contested election only for one or more to be disqualified because of a technicality.

The most important date to be aware of is **9 April 2015**.

Nominations for the elections close at 4pm on Thursday 9 April 2015. If a candidate turns up with their papers at 4:01 pm they will be rejected. Nomination papers cannot now be posted (a change that was brought in for the 2014 elections)



so they must be hand delivered to the borough or district council. Nomination papers can be delivered by anyone but candidates are advised to take responsibility for their own nomination papers by delivering them in person. Parish clerks should resist requests from existing councillors to deliver their nomination papers – it is a risk to the clerk and is potentially a misuse of the council's resources by the councillor.

Nomination papers will only be made available towards the end of March, so there is a very short window of opportunity in which to act. The borough or district council will normally send blank nomination packs to the clerk but they will also be available directly from the borough or district council and some are also putting them on their web site to download.

By 4pm on Friday 10 April 2015 the borough or district council will publish a statement of persons nominated for the parish or town council elections. This is the first moment that it will be possible to see whether or not there is to be a contested election. If there is the same number or fewer candidates than seats then those candidates will be declared elected. Hopefully there will be more candidates than seats, in which case the election will take place on Thursday 7 May 2015.

The nomination process itself is relatively straightforward and full details and instructions are given in the nomination packs. A candidate must be nominated by a proposer and seconder who must be local government electors in the parish (or ward) that the election is for. The Elections Officers at the borough or district council are there to assist candidates and it is highly recommended for candidates to make an appointment to deliver their nomination papers and have them checked by an Elections Officer. If this is done the week before 9 April then it gives the candidate a chance to correct any faults with the nomination.

## **ENCOURAGING CANDIDACY**

Ask a majority of parish and town councillors why they became a councillor and they'll reply that it was because someone asked them to. It must be rare for a member of the public to wake up one morning and think "I'll become a parish councillor", there is normally a "journey" that leads towards councillorship. It might be that someone has become involved in community issues by being on another group, such as a Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group, and that gives them a

stepping stone to standing for election. It might be someone who has been particularly exercised by a local issue such as a wind farm proposal or a housing development. They may have attended meetings of the parish council (constructively or destructively) and think that they would like to become a decision maker. It might be someone who comes out of the woodwork to help with a parish council project and gets hooked by the opportunity to give a little back to their community. Whatever the back-story, candidates have normally stuck their head above the parapet in some way before being a potential candidate for election as a councillor.

Of course, councillors can and do come from all backgrounds and all walks of life. It is true that councillors come in all shapes and sizes and all ages and demographics. But given that any recruitment campaign needs to get the maximum bang for the buck it is probably best to focus resources in places where it is most likely to find those that have already put their heads above the parapet. That's not to say that delivering an impassioned speech at a sixth-form assembly is not an admirable ambition, but the juice is not likely to be worth the squeeze.

The personal approach is by far and away the best method of recruitment. Yes, put articles in the newsletter and put notices on the notice boards, but there is no substitute for talking to people. Furthermore, it needs to be a two-stage process. The first stage is to plant the seed. An innocent question such as "*Have you ever thought of going on the parish council?*" will either be greeted with howls of derision and a tirade of abuse levelled at the current council or it will result in a "*Tell me more*" response. That's the time to talk positively about your own experience of being a councillor or clerk; it is not the time to blather on about election timetables and nomination packs. Once you've got a "hook" it is better to say something like "*If you're interested I could come and see you and give you more information*" or "*Have a look at the election information on the council's web site and then give me a call with any questions you have*" (followed up with a phone call in a week or two of course!).

If every existing councillor, whether or not they are standing for election themselves, took on the challenge of finding just one new candidate each then every council election would be contested and the sector would be in an entirely different place. Will you take up that challenge?

The personal approach of course needs to be supported with good, easily accessible information. The best place to put it is on the council's web site so that newsletter articles, posters and flyers can contain a link to it for more information. On the web site there should always be a named contact (normally the clerk) should web site visitors wish to speak to someone in person.

It is a good idea to create a target list. Think about places where likely candidates might be found, then think of individuals there that you could approach. One advantage of using a targeted approach is that it can help you to avoid cronyism. If you don't put any thought in to who you are going to approach then you will simply end up talking to those in your own circle of friends who probably share with you the same general outlook on life.

## **NEW-WORLD ELECTIONS**

Twitter and Facebook were around in 2011 but were far less popular than they are today. Facebook didn't even go public until 2012 and Twitter has added approximately 400 million users since 2011! Social media is a tool that cannot be ignored in local elections. Councils should consider having their own Twitter and Facebook accounts, but even if they don't someone (the clerk or a councillor) should be tasked with monitoring the social media channels for council-relevant conversations and posting appropriate responses. For example, on the community's Facebook page there might be a discussion about the need for new play equipment for young teenagers in the village. That's an ideal opportunity to post a reply along the lines of "*Great idea! That's something the parish council might think about and there are elections coming up in May. Perhaps you should try to get on the council!*"

And like any platform for communication there is always (at least!) one person who shouts the loudest and what an ideal comeback it is to say "*Are you standing for election then?*"!

*If every existing councillor, whether or not they are standing for election themselves, took on the challenge of finding just one new candidate each then every council election would be contested and the sector would be in an entirely different place. Will you take up that challenge?*

## CAMPAIGN TIMING

The recruitment campaign should start in earnest in the New Year, although Christmas parties and events are an ideal opportunity to start speaking to people and sowing the seeds. Certainly by the end of January information should be available on web sites and notice boards in the community and the personal approaches should be ramping up. Remember, that you've only got until mid-March to convince people to stand for election because the nomination process starts late March and finishes at 4pm on 9 April.

## WHAT DOESN'T WORK?



Doing nothing. This will almost inevitably lead to an uncontested election, particularly considering the high number of councillor retirements expected this time round. And why would anyone want to join a council that had done nothing itself to promote the election and to encourage candidacy?

Being defeatist and talking negatively about the elections will not encourage new candidates either. No one is saying it is easy but every council has the potential to have a contested election. There are candidates out there if you try. If you can only see doom and gloom then you might make a conscious decision to stay out of the recruitment campaign altogether, rather than working against those who are trying their best.

There are no forms of publicity that don't work at all; it is more a case of some being less effective than others. One tactic that rarely seems to deliver good results is the "Open Day for Prospective Candidates". It might seem a good idea to open up the Town Hall or village Reading Room for an afternoon with displays of all the good things the council has done over the years but it is likely that the councillors on duty on the day will greatly outnumber the visitors. Imagine how intimidating it must be for someone to attend such an open day and be pounced upon by well-meaning enthusiastic recruiters. It might work, just, in a very large village or town, but it is unlikely to pay off in a smaller village.

## OVERCOMING THE OBJECTIONS

### **Elections cost too much money**

Elections do cost. That's true. Clever councils put 25% of the likely cost of a contested election on the precept each year so that a contested election doesn't create a spike in the precept in election year. The cost of an election is a necessary and essential cost of having a parish or town council in the first place. You can't put a price on the value of democracy. Nor can you put a value on a refreshed, renewed council, with a strong democratic mandate arising from a strongly contested election that is brimming with enthusiasm to deliver great services to the electorate that put them there.

And this time round the parish and town council elections coincide with the district, borough and general election, so at least the fixed costs (polling stations, polling cards etc.) are shared!

### **Turkeys won't vote for Christmas!**

Well, firstly how derogatory to refer to councillors as turkeys!! But in all seriousness there is a view that it is not in the interests of existing councillors to encourage new candidates to put themselves forward for election. Actually, nothing could be further from the truth. Yes, there is a risk that an existing councillor who is seeking re-election may lose their seat if there is a contest, but if they are truly there for the good of the council (and after all, what other reason is there?!!) then they should put the council's democratic mandate above their own interests. A de-seated councillor can of course continue to support the council from the outside and may seek co-option should the opportunity arise or, indeed, election at a later date having had a refreshing break from councillorship.

### **No one is interested. Apathy reigns.**

There's no such thing as apathy. Professor Jerry Stoker from Southampton University says "*Show me the most apathetic member of your community. We'll hire a JCB and reverse it on to his front garden. Let's see how long he remains apathetic!*" The point is that what might be perceived as apathy is in fact a reaction to a lack of engagement or lack of relevance. If a council becomes relevant then people will engage. And remember that whilst it may seem that the community at large isn't particularly interested you are only looking for a handful of new candidates to come forward. It doesn't matter if the majority of residents don't engage... you're only looking for a few!

### **People don't want to put themselves forward for election**

This is undoubtedly a factor. It is interesting that councils that were left with vacancies following the 2011 elections had little problem filling those vacancies by co-option. People were happy to be councillors but didn't want to expose themselves to the scrutiny of the electoral process. The smaller the community the more likely this is to be an issue. In a council with 5 seats and six candidates for election no one wants to be the one that loses; better to not stand and then put yourself forward after the election if there are any vacancies. The way round this is to make it clear in the information for candidates the importance of a contested election to the council and that there is no loss of face if a candidate is unsuccessful. In other words, the very act of standing is a contribution to the community; win or lose. It is also good to make it clear that the election is not a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to be involved in the work of the council. There will be other elections, co-options, volunteer and paid roles, and all manner of other opportunities to contribute.

### **People are too busy these days, especially in our village**

It is very important to be open and honest about the time commitment that being a councillor involves. Quite often councillors say that their duties occupy them for about three hours a week. Obviously there are some councillors who spend more time than this – and some less. Also, the adage that if you want something done give it to a busy person applies to councillorship. Even people who leave the village early in the morning and get back late at night might have the capacity to attend one meeting a month, and you'll find they are often the first to respond to e-mails in between!

## **SOURCES OF INFORMATION**

In 2011 Northants CALC had its "Stand & Deliver" campaign to promote candidacy. Despite the excellent name the general feeling is that the campaign was not particularly effective, mainly because, as described above, the recruitment message is best when it comes from the council itself. For 2015 Northants CALC is not going to have a specific campaign but instead is going to make resources available online for member councils to download and use. Good-practice materials are being gathered from around the country and will be made available at <http://www.northantscalc.gov.uk/elections.html>. Member councils can make use of anything they find there. If your council has developed a good leaflet, poster, notice or web site page send the details to

[info@northantscalc.gov.uk](mailto:info@northantscalc.gov.uk) and it can be added to the resource library. We're particularly interested to receive newsletter text. There's some good information there now and more will be added over the coming weeks and months. A Google search will reveal a plethora of information about parish council elections... there's no shortage of material out there!

## **A ROUND-UP**

The following is presented in no particular order:

- Start preparing your campaign now. Launch in the New Year. Ramp it up over January and February. Conclude it at the end of March 2015.
- Use social media to get the message out, and monitor Twitter and Facebook to see what residents are saying about the council and the elections.
- There is no substitute to the personal approach. If you are a councillor take on the challenge to recruit at least one new candidate for election.
- Be positive. Recruiting is a challenge but if you keep at it and act strategically you will find new candidates out there.
- Involve the whole council. Every councillor has a responsibility to promote the elections and clerks should be doing all they can to ensure there is a contest.
- Be aware of the timetable and the process. Don't get so fixated on 7 May 2015 that you forget the fact that the deadline for receipt of nominations is 4pm on Thursday 9 April 2015.
- Be realistic. You're not trying to change the world. You are only asking people to put themselves forward for a role that can make a really positive contribution to the community in which they live or work.
- Use the resources at <http://www.northantscalc.gov.uk/elections.html> and when you've developed good stuff send it in so that it can be added to the library.

## **CONCLUSION**

In 2011 there were 22 contested elections in Northamptonshire. As a county we need to do significantly better than that in 2015 and if you help it can be achieved. If you have suggestions, contributions or feedback please contact [info@northantscalc.gov.uk](mailto:info@northantscalc.gov.uk). The June 2015 *eUpdate* will report how successful we've been, so best of luck for your campaign!

## **NEW MONEY AVAILABLE FOR NEIGHBOURHOOD PLANS**

DCLG Minister Brandon Lewis has announced £23 million new funding for Neighbourhood Plans.

1,200 communities in England are at some stage of developing a Neighbourhood Plan, and all 33 that have gone to referendum have been passed.

Housing Minister Brandon Lewis said: *“I now want to take this further, to get more people and communities involved in neighbourhood planning, and the £23 million I am announcing today will help many more community groups to bring their neighbourhood plans into reality.”*

The funding is being distributed by Locality and grants of up to £7,000 can now be applied for on [www.mycommunityrights.org.uk](http://www.mycommunityrights.org.uk).

## **THE LOCAL COUNCIL AWARD SCHEME**

The national Quality Parish Scheme (QPS) is being replaced with the Local Council Award Scheme from 6 January 2015.

The new scheme provides a framework to support all local councils to improve and develop to meet their full potential. It offers councils the opportunity to show that they meet standards that are set by the sector and assessed by their peers, and to put in place the conditions for continued improvement.

The Award Scheme has been designed to provide the tools and encouragement to those councils at the beginning of their improvement journeys, as well as promoting and recognising councils that are at the cutting edge of the sector. It is only through the sector working together, to share best practice, drive up standards and supporting those who are committed to improving their offer to their communities that individual councils and the sector as a whole will reach its full potential.



Councils can apply for an award at one of three levels:

- The Foundation Award demonstrates that a council meets the minimum requirements for operating lawfully and according to standard practice.
- The Quality Award demonstrates that a council achieves good practice in governance, community engagement and council improvement.
- The Quality Gold Award demonstrates that a council is at the forefront of best practice and achieves excellence in governance, community leadership and council development.

The scheme sets out criteria to meet at each level covering selected aspects of the council's work. Councils can seek to progress through the tiers over time thereby raising standards. Councils of any size can aspire to an award appropriate for their budget and level of activity.

A briefing meeting is being held at the beginning of February for those councils in Northamptonshire that were awarded Quality status under the old scheme. A general briefing for all councils will be held later in the year.

## **A CAUTIONARY TALE**

All parish and town councils are currently subject to an internal audit and an external audit – despite the system being called the “light touch audit regime”! For 95% of councils each year the external audit is based on the council's submitted Annual Return, which comes in four parts, with Part 1 and Part 2 being completed by the council, Part 3 being completed by the external auditor and Part 4 by the internal auditor. Part 1, the Accounting Statement, sets out the council's financial position and its receipts and payments. Part 1 must be approved by the council and signed by the chairman of the meeting at which the statement is approved and by the RFO.

So what's the cautionary tale? One council (not in Northamptonshire!) was confused to discover that the figures that were approved by the council were different to those eventually submitted to the external auditor. The clerk had presented the figures in pencil and the chairman had signed the form at the meeting. The clerk then rubbed out the figures and substituted their own.

The lesson is never sign off the form unless the figures are presented in ink!

## **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 December 2014 to February 2015**

Wed, 10 Dec 2014 6:30pm

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

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.

Mon, 09 Feb 2015 7:00pm

#### **Preparing for Year End Audit (Litchborough)**

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

Tue, 17 Feb 2015 10:00am

#### **Preparing for Year End Audit (Raunds)**

As above.

Tue, 24 Feb 2015 10:00am

#### **CiLCA 2015 (Session 1 of 7)**

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

Sat, 28 Feb 2015 10:00am

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

As above.

For information on any of these courses please see

[www.northantscalc.gov.uk/events.html](http://www.northantscalc.gov.uk/events.html) or for further information contact Anne Kirkland, Training Manager, on 01327 831482 or [akirkland@northantscalc.gov.uk](mailto:akirkland@northantscalc.gov.uk).

All courses must be accompanied by a course booking form, which can be downloaded from [www.northantscalc.gov.uk](http://www.northantscalc.gov.uk).

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

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

## **SITUATIONS VACANT**

**There are no vacancies currently.**

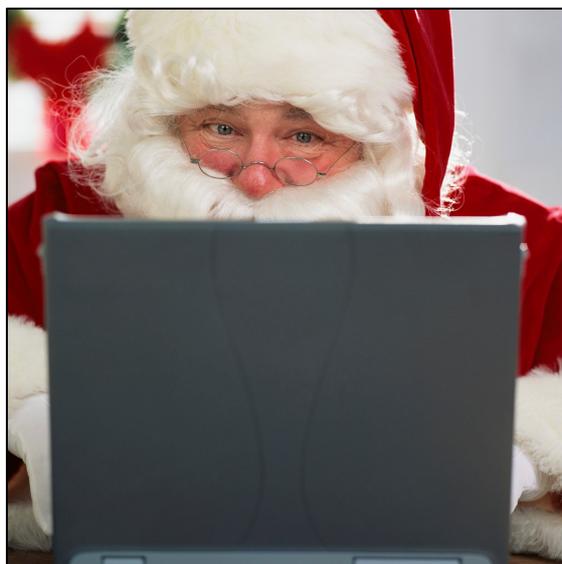
Please see <http://www.northantscalc.gov.uk/job-vacancies.html> for full details of parish and town council job vacancies as and when they occur.

If you are seeking a clerkship please contact Danny Moody at [dmoody@northantscalc.gov.uk](mailto:dmoody@northantscalc.gov.uk) with details of your geographical area of interest, how many hours per week you are looking for, and details of your qualifications and experience.

## **A LITTLE CHRISTMAS FUN**

The following is a fictitious extract from the “Matters arising” section of the minutes of Much Hooley Parish Council:

**4. Matters Arising** - Cllr Digby asked whether the bench had now been installed on the green. The clerk said that it hadn't because Mr Withers was supposed to be digging out the footings but had a bad back at the moment and couldn't do it. Cllr Digby said that it was ridiculous that the council had to wait and that in any case he had seen Mr Withers playing golf the other day with Mrs Wilkins and he seemed quite alright then. Cllr Digby said that his company could do the footing the very next day and because it was only a small job it would probably costs less than £100.



Cllr Farrell said that perhaps the bench should go up by the church instead because more people walk that way, especially the elderly. Cllr Kay said that Cllr Farrell was bound to say that because he walks to church and never goes down by the green. Cllr Farrell said that actually he doesn't walk to church anymore because of his gout and that if Cllr Kay went to church a bit more often then perhaps he would know that. Cllr Digby said he would do the work so long as it was at the green, so the council agreed so long as the cost wasn't more than £100.

The planning application that the council approved last meeting for a side extension to 30 Station Street (Bill Dropshaw's house) was brought up again by Cllr Kay who said that the extension would overshadow his garden at 28 Station Street and block out his light and that the council should overturn their decision. Cllr Dickens agreed and added that Bill had left the billiards team and seemed to want less and less to do with the village. The extension was probably so he could sell the house for more money and move away. Cllr Kay said that we should right to the County Council expressing strong concern about all the applications that seem to be coming along these days. Agreed.

As councillors know, the council is helping the village hall management committee with repairs to the village hall roof and the clerk had written to Highways asking for permission to have a skip on the road outside the village hall. A response from the Highways Licensing department had been received, which said "*You don't need permission to have a skip. You can cartwheel all around the village for all we care.*" However, enclosed with the letter was a risk assessment form for skipping and a guidance note on "Forward Momentum for Fun Procedures". It was decided not to continue the correspondence.

*Parish Clerk – Mr Evan Elpas*

## **CHRISTMAS CLOSING**



Santa says that we have been good enough in the office at Northants CALC to deserve a few days off over Christmas! Therefore the office will close on Wednesday 24 December 2014 and reopen on Monday 5 January 2015.

Happy holidays! Wassail!!

## NORTHANTS CALC CONTACTS

Danny Moody	Chief Executive <a href="mailto:dmoody@northantscalc.gov.uk">dmoody@northantscalc.gov.uk</a>
Anne Kirkland	Training Manager <a href="mailto:akirkland@northantscalc.gov.uk">akirkland@northantscalc.gov.uk</a>
Linda Bain	Administration Manager <a href="mailto:lbain@northantscalc.gov.uk">lbain@northantscalc.gov.uk</a>
General	<a href="mailto:info@northantscalc.gov.uk">info@northantscalc.gov.uk</a>
Member Enquiry Service	<a href="mailto:mes@northantscalc.gov.uk">mes@northantscalc.gov.uk</a>

### Address:

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

**Telephone:** 01327 831482



[www.northantscalc.gov.uk](http://www.northantscalc.gov.uk)

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