

# Update

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## THE CHIEF'S BRIEF

By Danny Moody, Chief Executive, Northants CALC

We have been incredibly busy with training over the past few months. There was an influx of brand-new councillors at the local elections and our popular Off to a Flying Start course has been oversubscribed, with Marie Reilly, our Training Manager putting on extra dates to meet demand. We have also seen an increase in whole-council development sessions, as councils gear up for the brave new future and all the demands and pressures it may bring. You will find details of our training offer at <https://www.northantscalc.com/training-and-events.html>. Do take a look; there is something of interest for everyone. Training is an expected element of good councillorship, and it is vital that councillors build core competency, particularly in specialist areas such as finance, information governance, and planning and development control.

We have been busy recruiting too, and I am very pleased to announce that we have been joined by Sophie Harding who is our new Business Support Manager. There is more about Sophie in an article below. Please give her a warm welcome when you phone or email.

Talking of recruitment, there have been a lot of council vacancies over the past few months. I have analysed all the vacancies occurring since 1 January 2021 and there is not a single reason causing the vacancies. It appears to be a combination of several factors, including the creation of the six new councils (all of which now have, or will soon have, multiple employees), and a higher-than-usual number of clerks choosing the moment of Local Government Reorganisation and/or the local elections as an opportunity to leave or retire. Another factor that has exacerbated the situation is the increase over the past decade of multi-councillled clerks, clerks who work for two, three, four councils on a part time basis at each one. When a multi-councillled clerk hangs up their boots it leaves a big hole to fill.

I was very pleased to see the launch last month of the national Civility and Respect Project, which is a joint project between the National Association of Local Councils (NALC), CALCs, and One Voice Wales (OVW), as the membership organisations representing the first tier of local government in England and Wales, and the Society of Local Council Clerks (SLCC) as the professional body for clerks. The bodies have committed to working together to promote civility and

respect in public life, good governance, positive debate and supporting the well-being of councillors, professional officers, and staff. There is an issue with bullying in the sector, which the project aims to address. The incidence of bullying is no higher in parish and town councils than in other walks of life, but the unique environment and dynamics of a parish or town council make it so much harder to deal with, and so destructive when it does occur. Bullying is not acceptable. Ever. My view is that there are 101 ways of reducing the incidence of bullying and dealing with it swiftly and effectively when it does happen, so it is a case of identifying those ways and producing new tools for the sector in terms of policies, guidance, frameworks, and training. Lots of work has been done over the years, but it never really comes to fruition, so this new initiative is backed with funding from the national bodies that will pay for a project manager (closing date for applications 2/8/21, see [vacancy notice](#)), whose job it will be to make sure that the talk and ideas are translated into tangible outputs for the benefit of the sector. I am following progress very closely and I will keep member councils informed of opportunities to get involved in terms of consultations, surveys, and workshops.

The unitary councils are, at the time of publication, 120 days old and it would be reasonable to say that it hasn't been all plain sailing. Member councils report to us that contacting officers at the unitary councils has been particularly frustrating. Work is being done by the unitary councils to grease the wheels, but it needs to improve soon. My take is that the unitary councils were supposed to be a seamless continuation of the predecessor councils, but in fact they are much more like brand new organisations, grappling with the teething troubles of new IT and telephone systems, new managers, new teams, new ways of working. There is more about the unitary councils and the positive work we are doing with them below.

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With the easing and then lifting of Covid restrictions as of 19 July 2021, we are starting to venture out again as some councils have requested face-to-face training sessions, which we are happy to accommodate. In June 2021 I incurred my first travel expenses since February 2020 when I attended the Northampton Parishes Forum held at Wootton Community Centre and later when I delivered a

whole-council development session for Boughton Parish Council. It was a timely reminder that people have legs and aren't just heads and shoulders! The Northants CALC July board meeting was a hybrid meeting held in Great Addington Memorial Hall, with 6 people present in the room and 5 others joining by Zoom. It worked very well but was totally reliant on good Internet and the power staying on. Parish and town councils are not yet permitted to hold hybrid meetings, but it could be an option for the future. As things stand, a councillor must be physically present in a geographical location to be deemed "present" at a meeting. A councillor could join a meeting by remote means but would not be deemed to be "present" and therefore could not take part in the meeting, debate, or vote; they would essentially have the same status as a member of the public, but at least they could hear and see the proceedings. The legislation does not prevent clerks from attending remotely, and some councils have made use of that fact, particularly for committee meetings, to save the clerk's time and travel expenses. We don't yet know what the new world will be like, but we do know that it won't be the same as the old world. Agile working, remote working, and hybrid meetings will all be part of the mix. Councils should be gearing up now for the new world by ensuring that IT equipment is suitable and up to date, and that good broadband is available at the council's normal meeting place. "*Our village hall doesn't have Internet*" is an excuse; superfast broadband is available throughout Northamptonshire, it's just a case of how much it costs to install.

One of Northants CALC's roles is representing our member councils, so it is pleasing when a body or group wants to include parish and town councils and invites the Association to join it. Two such occurrences have happened recently: The Northamptonshire Armed Forces Covenant Partnership has just reviewed its membership in light of Local Government Reorganisation and invited Northants CALC to join as a conduit to parish and town councils and thence to communities. Similarly, a committee has been established under the auspices of the Lord-Lieutenant of Northamptonshire to co-ordinate the Queen's Platinum Jubilee celebrations next year, and Northants CALC has been invited to join so that parish and town councils are fully engaged. We will circulate information on both important topics as and when meetings get underway. Our inclusion in these countywide initiatives is a consequence of the dissolution of the borough and district councils, who would previously have had senior officer representation on these groups to represent the local view. Even though the unitary councils have locality teams, they will never be able to operate effectively at individual community level; that's where parish and town councils come into their own!

## **PRECEPT 2021/22 – THE RESULTS**

There are 10,239 local precepting bodies in England. Of these, 8,877 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 £618 million in 2021/22, an increase of 3.51% on 2020/21. It represents 1.8% 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 largest town councils account for just over 7% of the total precept raised. Eight of these have precepts higher than £2 million.

The average Band D tax rate for all precepting councils in 2021/22 is £74.35, an increase of £1.65 or 2.98% over the previous year. Again, there is huge variation. The highest Band D set this year was by Falmouth Town Council in Cornwall, which increased its Band D tax rate from £306.72 to £371.17. The lowest Band D tax rate was £0.26!

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 2021/22 is £16,834,257, an increase of £3,912,029 or 30% due to the creation of the large new town councils in Northamptonshire. The average Band D tax rate for 2021/22 is £73.36, an increase of £4.03 or 5.8%.

The highest precepting council is Northampton Town Council at £1,775,500. 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.

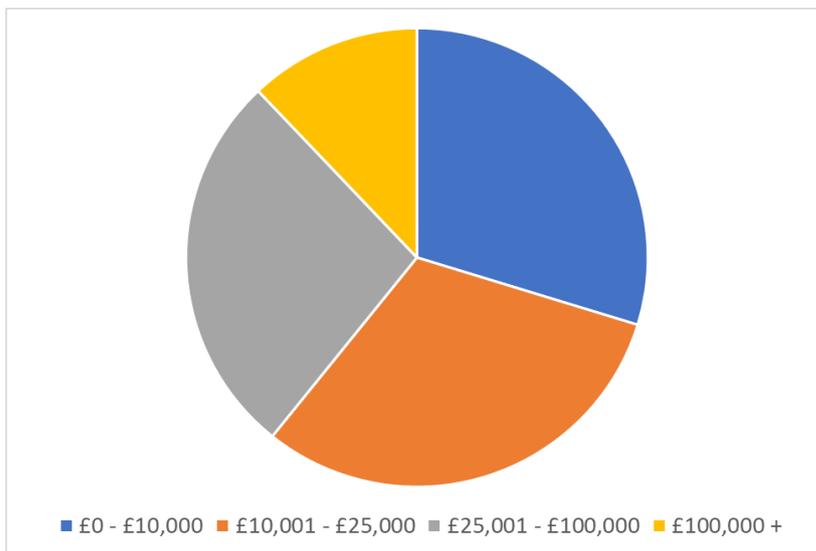
The top ten precepting councils raise a total of £7,951,993 or 47% of the total for all councils. The average Band D tax rate for the top ten councils is £136.56.

The highest Band D tax rates in Northamptonshire are levied by Lilbourne Parish Council (£220.08), Oundle Town Council (£219.75) and West Haddon Parish Council (£195.12).

The lowest precepting body is Catesby Parish Meeting, with a precept of just £90 and a Band D tax rate of £2.54!

Most precepting bodies in Northamptonshire have a very modest income. 69 councils (29%) have a precept of £10,000 or less and a further 72 councils (30%) have a precept between £10,001 and

£25,000. 60 councils (26%) 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	£6,192,634 (£5,432,412)	£63.74 (£59.92)
West	141	24	£10,641,623 (£7,489,816)	£79.90 (£75.75)

Precept levels and Band D tax rates have gone up in both unitary authority areas. The figures are partly skewed by the creation of Northampton Town Council, Kingsthorpe Parish Council, and Far Cotton and Delapre Community Council in West Northamptonshire, and Corby Town Council, Kettering Town Council, and Wellingborough Town Council in North Northamptonshire Council. And nationally, the Band D tax rate for parish and town councils in unitary areas is 13% higher than in non-unitary areas, reflecting the inevitable transfer of services and functions from unitary councils to parish and town councils.

Total parish precept in Northamptonshire will reach £20m in the next few years.

## MEET SOPHIE

Our newest recruit is Sophie Harding, who joined Northants CALC on 26 July 2021 as Business Support Manager. Sophie has lived in Northamptonshire all her life and was previously working for the Northamptonshire Parent Infant Partnership (NorPIP), a charity supporting parents-to-be and parents with children under two to form stable relationships where she held the position of Business Manager. Sadly, NorPIP lost its funding and recently had to close its doors.



Sophie has a 1st Class Hons Degree in Psychology with Criminology from the University of Northampton and a Masters Degree in Counselling, which she completed in 2018. Sophie is a Graduate Member of the British Psychological Society (BPS) and a Registered Member of the British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy (BACP).

Sophie is first in the queue for answering the office phone, so you will get to speak to her next time you call. She will be responsible for the Association's finances and the Management Systems and will co-ordinate and manage the Northants CALC Internal Audit Service (IAS), the Member Enquiry Service (MES), and the Police Liaison Representative (PLR) Scheme.

In the future we are keen to use Sophie's skills and knowledge to develop new services for member councils such as a payroll service, recruitment support, finance support, project management, and funding advice. However, we will let her take her coat off first before expecting too much!

In her non-work life Sophie says she enjoys reading and jigsaw puzzles and spending time with her dog, Max, and baking for family and friends.

Sophie's appointment represents a significant investment for the Association in what is a critical time for parish and town councils in Northamptonshire. Member councils are upping their game, and the Association needs the resources to provide quality and timely support. We are now at just under 4 Full Time Equivalents, so still a small organisation but four times bigger than a decade ago!

## LOCAL ELECTIONS WASH UP

Local elections were held on 6 May 2021, which already seems like a lifetime ago! There are 220 parish and town councils in Northamptonshire and 204 were up for election this year. The remaining 16 councils are in the former district of Daventry and are on a different electoral cycle. They will come into sync from 2025.

Northants CALC conducted a survey in June of the 204 councils with elections. 187 councils (92%) responded, which is superb (thank you!).

Getting the bad news out of the way early, only 35 councils (17%) managed to have a contested election (i.e. where the number of candidates was greater than the number of seats available). Parish and town councils are democratic bodies, and the figure should be 100%. The reasons why parish and town councils struggle to have contested elections are many and various and, as we will see below, it is not all doom and gloom. The main reason cited in the survey was the fact that people are happy to be co-opted after the election but do not want to expose themselves to the electoral process. In small communities, where the electors are your friends and neighbours, there is no hiding place if you are not elected! General apathy was the second highest reason cited, but some councils managed strongly contested elections, so it is important to remember that “apathy” is a changeable state; it is not permanently fixed.

127 councils (62%) were either contested, had a full complement, or just one vacancy following the elections. Only 36 councils (18%) had two or more vacancies, so there were plenty of candidates, it's just that most councils avoided a contested election. Of the 188 parish councils, 23 (12%) were contested. Of the 17 town councils, 12 (70%) were contested. The seven largest councils (by electorate) were all contested, and 15 (75%) of the largest 20 councils. The issue of not wanting to be exposed to the electoral process is inversely proportional to the size of the community. Plus, there is the effect of party politics and all four of the new town councils were hotly contested:

Council	Seats	Candidates
Corby	17	38
Kettering	20	54
Northampton	25	60
Wellingborough	23	49

Northampton and Corby Town Councils ended up in Labour control, and Kettering and Wellingborough Town Councils ended up in Conservative control. The party machines ensured there were plenty of candidates contesting the seats!

For a council to be eligible to use the General Power of Competence (GPOC), which gives it the legal power “*to do anything that individuals generally may do*” (Section 1, Localism Act 2011) and frees it from most legal restrictions in terms of the services it provides, it must have at least two thirds elected councillors and a qualified clerk. A huge 162 councils (79%) achieved the elected mandate part of the eligibility criteria. Not all of those have a qualified clerk yet, but it is great that at least the elected councillors are in place.

Our experience is that the niggles and frustrations of the elections process (e.g. hand delivery of nomination papers) are quickly forgotten after the elections, and only remembered again before the next elections when it is too late to do anything about it, so in the survey we asked for 6 clerks to join a focus group session to debrief the elections and identify areas for improvement for 2025. I’m pleased to say that there were 24 expressions of interest, so we will select 6 and set up a meeting shortly, to include the Election Managers at both unitary councils.

## **A DATE FOR YOUR DIARY**

The 74th Northants CALC AGM will take place on Saturday 2 October 2021, from 10:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m. Please put the date in your diary now!

The venue is yet to be finalised, depending on capacity but it will be somewhere in or near Northampton.

The theme is “*Six Months of Unitary – How Has It Been For You?*” (working title!) and we hope to have speakers from North Northamptonshire Council (NNC) and West Northamptonshire Council (WNC) as well as from parish and town councils, large, medium, and small. It will be interesting to reflect on where we are in October, six months on from Vesting Day, and where we hope to be by the time of the next AGM! Obviously, the AGM arrangements will be subject to last-minute alterations, but we want to try having an in-person event. Further details will be circulated in due course.



October 2021						
M	T	W	T	F	S	S
				1	2	3
4	5	6	7	8	9	10
11	12	13	14	15	16	17
18	19	20	21	22	23	24
25	26	27	28	29	30	31

**Saturday 2nd Oct 2021**

## **PAY AWARD 2021/22 UPDATE**

Negotiations on local government pay for 2021/22 are ongoing. The National Employers met on 27 July 2021 to consider a further response to the trade unions' correspondence of 25 June 2021 that had rejected the Employer's previous pay offer of 1.5% on all pay points (SCPs) with effect from 1 April 2021. The National Employers agreed a "final offer" to increase all pay points by 1.75% (with an additional 1% for SCP 1, which isn't used in parish and town councils, as pay starts at SCP 5). The 1.75% would be backdated to 1 April 2021.

The ball is back in the unions' court. The unions had originally asked for a 10% increase in pay across the board plus a whole raft of additional benefits including reduced working hours, more holiday entitlement, and longer parental leave entitlement. 1.75% is clearly nowhere near what the unions wanted, and it remains to be seen whether the unions concede or whether they consider strike action. The unions will now consult their members.

The National Employers "*hope this final offer can quickly form the basis of an agreement between the two Sides so that employees, who continue to provide such critical support to their communities, can receive a pay rise as soon as practicable.*"

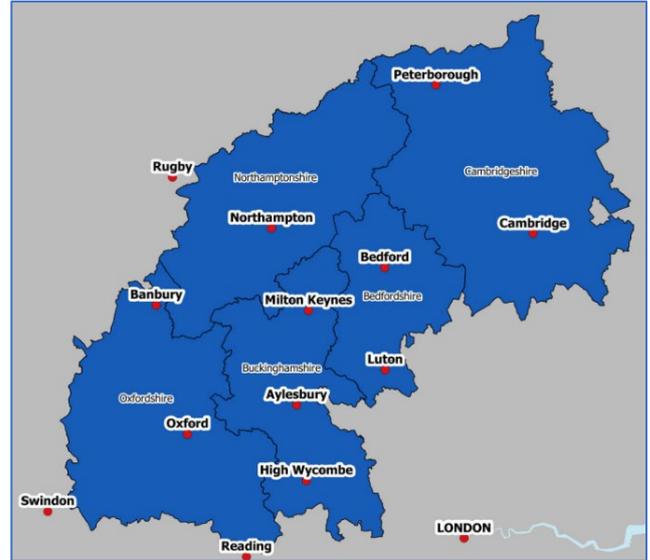
Parish and town clerks' pay is tagged to the National Joint Council terms and conditions (aka "the Green Book") and gets caught up in these national negotiations every year. NJC provides a useful framework for parish and town councils, which ensures parity and removes the difficulty of local negotiation. However, the National Employers are not focused on the needs and special circumstances of parish and town councils and there is a clear rationale for considering a different framework. Some people have even suggested that clerks' pay is subject to market forces rather than a nationally agreed framework, which would allow councils to respond to local pressures, paying more where local competition dictates. The difficulty with that approach is that the union for parish and town clerks is the Association of Local Council Clerks (ALCC), which has meagre resources and limited membership. Leaving each clerk to negotiate their own pay locally would put them in a very weak position, so, for now, we wait patiently for the national negotiations to play out.

As soon as there is further news, we will disseminate it to member councils.

## OXFORD-CAMBRIDGE ARC

The Oxford-Cambridge Arc is a huge swathe of middle England that has been identified for inward investment and development.

The Arc is a centre of high-tech manufacturing and research but east-west infrastructure within the Arc is limited. Work has begun to extend East West Rail from Bicester to the West Coast Main Line at Bletchley (Milton Keynes) and onward extension to Cambridge is planned. New roads linking the A34 near Oxford with the A14 near Cambridge are planned.



With the improved infrastructure comes huge economic and residential development. The plan is for one million new homes in the Arc by 2050.

The Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) has launched a consultation called “*Creating a vision for the Oxford-Cambridge Arc*”, which will “*focus on making the Arc a better place to live, helping to implement strategic planning under four ‘pillars’: environment, economy, connectivity and infrastructure, and place-making.*”

Sustainability will be at the heart of the process, so alongside seeking views on the vision, the government is also seeking views on the initial work done to set the scope of the Sustainability Appraisal (SA), which will address environmental, social and economic factors.

The consultation will run for 12 weeks until 12 October 2021 and is open to all members of the public. Councils are encouraged to respond and to share the consultation with residents. Whether the Arc is a good thing for Northamptonshire depends on your point of view. It will bring jobs and investment, but it will also bring significant housing and population growth. See the government’s consultation pages at <https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/creating-a-vision-for-the-oxford-cambridge-arc> for details on how to respond.

## THE QUEEN'S PLATINUM JUBILEE

The Platinum Jubilee will be celebrated on an extended bank holiday weekend from Thursday 2 to Sunday 5 June 2022. The Queen will become the first British Monarch to celebrate a Platinum Jubilee, seventy years of service, having acceded to the throne on 6 February 1952.

The United Kingdom's long tradition of celebrating Royal Jubilees, Weddings and Coronations with the lighting of beacons will be continued to mark the Platinum Jubilee. Many parish and town councils in Northamptonshire lit beacons for the Golden Jubilee in 2012 and all are encouraged to do so again for the Platinum Jubilee.



The beacon lighting event will take place on 2 June 2022 throughout the United Kingdom, Channel Islands, Isle of Man, UK Overseas Territories and for the first time, in each of the capital cities of the Commonwealth countries.

A comprehensive guide is available at [www.queensjubileebeacons.com](http://www.queensjubileebeacons.com), including details on the various types of beacons that can be used for this historic occasion, including bonfire beacons, gas-fuelled beacons for use on church towers and castle battlements, to permanent beacon braziers made and lit in town centres and on village greens, to state-of-the-art "green" beacons using lasers.

Parish and town councils can register their details to receive monthly guide updates over the next eleven months. The names of registered councils will be entered in a special leather-bound book being presented to The Queen after the Jubilee Weekend. See page 10 of the guide at [www.queensjubileebeacons.com](http://www.queensjubileebeacons.com) for registration instructions.

Bruno Peek, the Queen's Pageantmaster, says "*This could well be the last chain of beacons lit during The Queen's reign, so we want to make it the largest and most dramatic the world has ever seen. We do hope therefore, that you will help us achieve this by taking part in lighting a beacon at 9.15pm on 2nd June next year.*"

## UNITARY COUNCIL UPDATE

The mood music from the shadow unitary councils in the run up to Vesting Day and the local elections was very favourable towards parish and town councils. *“Parish councils are very important partners”* and *“It is vital that we work together for the good of our communities”* were the sort of phrases that rolled off the tongues of the unitary authority guests at our popular LGR Q&A events in the spring of 2021. So, what is happening now, four months on from Vesting Day? Were the comments simply platitudes, or is there any evidence that the unitary councils intend to work well with parish and town councils?

I am pleased to report that it is the latter. The leadership of both North Northamptonshire Council (NNC) and West Northamptonshire Council (WNC) recognise the value of parish and town councils, and that for the unitary councils to be successful at individual community level they must leverage the forensic local knowledge of first-tier parish and town councils.

The unitary council Chief Executives (Rob Bridge for NNC and Anna Earnshaw for WNC) have been accessible to Northants CALC and have helped ensure that the right connections are made with other officers. Predominantly our contact is at Assistant Director (AD) level, with Kerry Purnell (NNC) and Jo Barrett (WNC) who have specific responsibility for managing the relationship with parish councils in their respective areas (as well as an awful lot of other things too!). Northants CALC has had regular meetings with Kerry and Jo and there are exciting plans in development for working with parish and town councils. The ADs are busy building their new teams and structures and working out how to amalgamate the various teams that existed in the predecessor authorities. It is a work in progress and will take months to sort out. There are issues to resolve urgently, particularly the day-to-day contact between parish and town clerks and unitary council officers (e.g. in democratic services, planning, regulatory services etc), but keep in mind that we are only 120 days in.

On the political side there has been good support too. Both Leaders (Cllr Jason Smithers for NNC and Cllr Jonathan Nunn for WNC) have been parish councillors and know the sector very well. And both councils have appointed senior members with specific responsibility for parish and town councils within their portfolios. Cllr David Howes is the Executive Member for Rural Communities & Localism for NNC, and Cllr David Smith is the Cabinet Member for Community Safety &

Engagement and Regulatory Services for WNC. Northants CALC has held good meetings with both the Davids and there is a clear desire to build a strong relationship between the tiers. In June 2021, Cllr David Howes wrote to all the parish and town councils in North Northamptonshire and said, *“I want to say from the outset how much the new Unitary Council values its relationship with Town and Parish Councils, and I look forward to working with you over the coming months and years.”*

Both unitary councils are intent on continuing in some shape or form the parish forums that operated prior to Local Government Reorganisation. WNC has decided to create “Localities” based on the former district council geography and has recently hosted parish forums in each area. The Localities may not exist for ever, but they make sense for the time being whilst there are legacy differences between the areas (such as planning, waste collection, special expenses etc). NNC is keen to establish parish forums too and is considering how they might be structured. Using the former boundaries as WNC has done is one option, but there are others, such as a north/south or east/west split, or a rural/urban split, or a thematic split, or a combination. Northants CALC is working with the unitary councils to design a structure that works for all concerned.

In 2020 Northants CALC proposed a *“Model for Collaboration Between Parish & Town Councils and Unitary Councils in Northamptonshire”* that set out seven different levels:

1 Compete	2 Co-exist	3 Communicate	4 Co-operate	5 Co-ordinate	6 Collaborate	7 Coalesce
Competition for resources, arguments over service delivery, protectionism over assets, competing for public attention – and talking openly about the others’ weaknesses.	No systematic connection between tiers of council, but little negative impact on each other.	Sharing (both ways) of information between the tiers and keeping each other informed. Some formalised networking (e.g. forums).	Tiers interact as needed, often on an ad hoc basis on discrete projects and activities. Talking positively about each other’s respective roles and responsibilities.	Tiers systematically adjust and align work with each other to achieve better outcomes for communities than would be possible working separately.	Longer term, more formalised interaction based on shared mission, goals, shared decision-making and shared resources where appropriate.	Fully cohesive and integrated business plans and corporate objectives. Integrated service delivery with co-production to achieve the best outcomes for communities.

Assessing the relationship now, it is mostly in Column 3, with elements in Columns 1 and 2, and elements in 4 and 5. Parish and town councils and the unitary councils must all work together towards the righthand side the model. It is where the biggest bang for the buck will be achieved for the benefit of communities in Northamptonshire.

## **NATIONAL PLANNING POLICY FRAMEWORK**

When the government consults on a matter, and councils take the time to submit their responses, it is always good to hear what the results of the consultation were and how the responses helped shape policy development.

You might remember the consultation in Spring 2021 on the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) and a National Model Design Code, and the government has now published a summary of the responses received at <https://bit.ly/3yg8nN0>. The NPPF has been revised in light of the consultation and other recent developments in government policy and is available at <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/national-planning-policy-framework>.

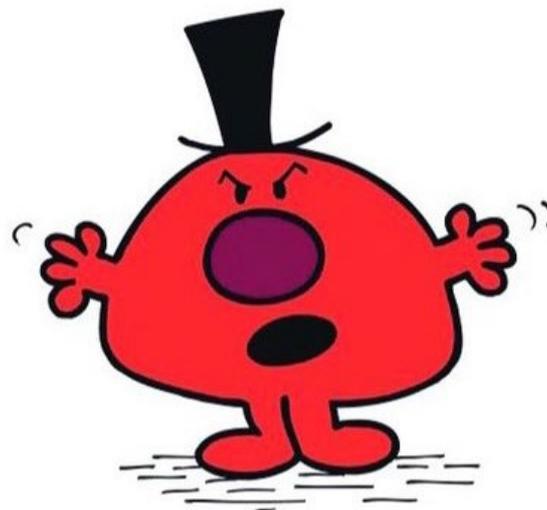
## **DEALING WITH MR (OR MRS) ANGRY**

Clerks, and to a slightly lesser extent councillors, may from time to time be exposed to the wrath of an irate member of the public. It might be someone who feels unfairly treated by the council or feels that the council is not doing something they think should be done. Whatever the circumstances, some members of the public seem to think that councils, their councillors, and officers, are fair game. Because parish and town councils are public bodies, they think it is OK to act in an aggressive, bullying, and intimidating way. It is not OK, and clerks and councillors should not feel that they “have to take it” just because the council is accountable to the public.

It is not uncommon to hear reports of clerks and councillors being afraid to turn on their computers and download their emails in case “that man (or woman)” has sent yet another diatribe. It can cause stress, depression, and in the worst cases, even long-term mental health issues.

So, what to do when faced with such a situation? Firstly, don’t do anything! See if things make more sense later in the day or tomorrow. The part of the human brain that does this sense-making switches off under conditions of stress. Flight or fight – don’t think! This includes any thinking which involves imagination, perspective taking, and slowly putting together a story of “how this person and I came to be saying or doing these things.” Faced with a furious member of the public, the mind switches quickly to certainty. We find ourselves thinking “I know exactly why you are saying that!”, and/or taking sudden decisive action

(sometimes called “certainty-thinking” and “action-thinking.”). It is based on minimal reasoning or understanding, but at the time it feels right and deeply reassuring to do it. It may even feel empowering to us in the moment. Hitting “Reply” and bashing out an emotionally charged response within minutes of receipt might feel cathartic, that you are giving as good as you get, that you are standing toe to toe with the member of the public and not backing down or being pushed around. This is exactly what happens when our minds slip into an ‘everything is at stake’ state.



The problem is that this survival thinking still fires up at times when the threat is mostly not about immediate survival, but something much more complicated. It is about the challenge of being able to make sense of something and (through making sense of it so that the other person feels understood) being in a better position to exert a genuine and helpful influence on that person about whom we care as a member of the public. This is an important point, because making sense of someone (so they feel understood) is the key to being able to have a benign influence on them.

Clerks and councillors are generally caring people and want to provide a great service to members of the public, but the more you care, the more prone you are to lose your ability to hesitate and reflect in ways that might achieve this. It is a natural paradox and happens precisely because so much is at stake! The advice is not to care less, but to understand how caring can affect us and the way we approach our work.

So, next time you receive a missive from Mr Angry, do not reply. Take at least 24 hours to reflect on it. Read it several times to gain understanding (it is amazing how reading something in the heat of the moment causes you to skip over key points, or to misinterpret what is actually being said). When you are sure that you are responding with your rational brain, compose a polite and concise reply. Then file that away for a day or two as well. Review it. Reword it. Then send. The few days this process takes will help Mr Angry to calm down; by the time they receive your response they may even regret having fired off their email in the first place!

## CALL TO LOCAL COUNCILS TO GRANT A GREEN

Do you own a green space which you would like to see protected and enjoyed by local people for ever? If so, the Open Spaces Society (OSS) recommends that you consider voluntarily registering it as a town or village green. You can do this, under section 15(8) of the Commons Act 2006, with your unitary council, which makes no charge for the application.



*The village green in Scorton in North Yorkshire, protected from development.*

Once registered as a green, local people will enjoy the right to recreation there, and the space is protected for ever from development – what a gift to your community!

It is more important now than ever to secure our green spaces. The restrictions on movement have meant that people have discovered how essential their local open spaces are to good health and sanity. Green spaces are under threat from the pressure to allocate land for housing development. The society is deeply concerned that just when they are needed most, green spaces are at growing risk of development.

So please do consider whether, if you are fortunate enough to own a green space, you can register it as a green. In the last year we have celebrated such registrations at Scorton in North Yorkshire and the society's hometown of Henley-on-Thames in Oxfordshire, where the local councils have acted in the interests of their residents.

The OSS explains on its website how this is done, with a how-to-do it guide to take you through the process. And the society's case officers are on hand to give you further assistance if you need it.

Please visit <https://www.oss.org.uk/grant-a-green-campaign/>

## CCTV & SURVEILLANCE

A parish or town council operating any overt surveillance camera system in public places in England and Wales must pay due regard to the Surveillance Camera Code of Practice (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/surveillance-camera-code-of-practice>).

As part of the Surveillance Camera Commissioner's role to raise standards, he has produced a self-assessment tool which enables organisations to find out how well they comply with the Surveillance Camera Code of Practice and highlight any areas for improvement. The self-assessment tool is available to use at <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/surveillance-camera-code-of-practice-self-assessment-tool>.



Following on from the Code and the self-assessment tool is the Commissioner's third-party certification process that will enable organisations to be audited against the Code by an accredited body party with the view to receiving a certification mark and a certificate issued by the Commissioner. This process will help to raise standards in the industry and enable organisations to demonstrate their compliance with the Code.

As technology improves and becomes more affordable, parish and town councils are increasingly using surveillance to combat issues such as anti-social behaviour and fly-tipping.

It is essential that councils have in place clear policies and procedures for operating CCTV that fully comply with the Code, particularly regarding the gathering, storage, and use of personal data.

If your council is considering using surveillance, please contact Northants CALC and we can put you in touch with suppliers, advisors, and with other councils who already operate CCTV.

## HIGHWAYS COMMUNITY LIAISON OFFICERS

The Northamptonshire Highways Community Liaison Officers (CLOs) are Sarah Barnwell and Ian Boyes for North Northamptonshire, and Craig White, Helen Howard, and Matthew Clark for West



Northamptonshire. All are currently employed by West Northamptonshire Council (WNC), which hosts the highways contract for the whole county during a transition phase.

The CLOs are the key contact between the local community and the highways service on issues such as speeding, parking nuisance, general highway concerns, and requests for services. They provide a breadth of advice and expertise on the services and policies of Northamptonshire Highways.

The CLOs liaise with unitary council officers and members and MPs regarding current highways policies, responsibilities, and works programmes. They work to secure additional funding for local repairs and improvement works.

The CLOs cannot deliver everything communities would like them to and they need to make difficult decisions about how to make the best use of the limited funds available. They have in-depth knowledge and understanding of many aspects of highway law, policies, engineering methods, and best practice. They can explain highways policy and regularly attend parish council meetings, site visits, and 'walkabouts' to look at issues and develop solutions.

Over the years, the CLOs have delivered small projects like signage or road markings, sets of dropped kerbs, and privately-funded schemes including footway safety improvements and safer routes to school to improve accessibility and encourage more children to walk or cycle to school, whilst improving the air quality and surrounding environment.

Your CLO can be contacted at [firstname.lastname@westnorthants.gov.uk](mailto:firstname.lastname@westnorthants.gov.uk).

## SITUATIONS VACANT

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

### Wellingborough Town Council

Wellingborough Town Council is a new council with 23 councillors representing 50,000 residents in Wellingborough. The Council is recruiting a Deputy Clerk and is seeking a professional, dedicated person who is passionate about doing the best job to join their team. The role is 25 hours per week on NJC Scale Points 29 - 33. If you are seeking a new challenge and meet these criteria, the town council would love to hear from you. The council also has a vacancy for a Project Officer at 14 hours per week, also on NJC Scale points 29 – 33.

The closing date for applications for both opportunities is **24 August 2021**. For details please visit <https://www.wellingboroughtowncouncil.gov.uk/job-vacancies.html>.

### Brixworth Parish Council

Brixworth is a large village on the A508 Harborough Road, 7 miles north of Northampton near Pitsford Water. Brixworth Parish Council has a vacancy for a Clerk/RFO working 37 hours per week. The council has 14 seats and there are 4,356 electors. The precept for 2021/22 is £166,460. The closing date for applications is Friday **13 August 2021**.

### Old Parish Council

The village of Old is in the district of Daventry, seven miles south west of Kettering. The village has just over 400 electors and the council set a precept for 2021/22 of £13,319. The council has an immediate vacancy for a Clerk/RFO working 26 hours per month initially. The closing date for applications is 5pm on Monday **16 August 2021**.

### Stanion Parish Council

Stanion is a small village 2 miles south east of Corby. Stanion Parish Council has a vacancy for a Clerk/RFO working 10 hours per week initially. The council has 9 seats and there are 790 electors. The precept for 2021/22 is £13,018. The closing date for applications is 5pm on **2 August 2021**.

## A CAUTIONARY TALE

Do you know where all your council's money is? Or to put it another way, do you know where all the public's money is that the council holds? And even if you do know where it is, can it be accessed? It is not uncommon for councils to have "forgotten" accounts, containing hundreds, or even thousands of pounds. And at this time in the electoral cycle, it is quite common for accounts to be inaccessible due to some or all of the signatories to the account not being re-elected. At best it can be a time-consuming inconvenience. At worst public funds are at risk.

Most accounts these days operate with some sort of web access, and there is likely to be a trail of emails between the council and the account provider, but back in the day the only evidence of the existence of an account might have been a paying in book, and those are easy to mislay, particularly when there is a change of clerk and the council's files and documents sit in holding in a councillor's house. Old post office accounts, building society bonds, and charitable funds are the most likely to get "forgotten".

One council recently discovered a "forgotten" account, but it was too late to recover the money because the money had long since been transferred to the government's Dormant Assets Scheme, which attempts to reunite people and organisations with their financial assets, but where this is not possible, the money goes towards social and environmental initiatives across the UK. The funds will have been put to good use, just not in the parish that they originated from.

The only real way of finding out whether lost accounts might exist is to search the council's minute record and, if available, historical accounts. Some councils have 30 years of electronic records now, which makes searching for key terms, such as "account", "bank", and "signatory" a bit easier. If you find mention of an account or other financial asset but no mention of a resolution to close it, then you might have discovered a lost account. In such circumstances the first step is to contact the provider of the account with the account details to see if it is still active.

In a situation where an account is not lost, but it is inaccessible due to none of the signatories being still on the council (or even still alive), contact Northants CALC and we can help. We can arrange for a solicitor's letter to establish the bona fides of existing councillors and officers, to at least open a dialogue between the council and the bank or building society.

## 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.

### Appraisal Skills

Wed, 08 Sep 2021 10:00

This 90-minute seminar will cover practical aspects regarding Appraisals for Town and Parish Councils including establishing the reasons for conducting appraisals and how they can benefit the council, and producing effective action plans that are implementable, cost effective and benefit the employee as well as the council.

### Off to a Flying Start **\*\*FULLY BOOKED\*\***

Thu, 09 Sep 2021 18:30

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

### New Clerks Autumn 2021 (Day 1)

Sat, 11 Sep 2021 10:00

This course provides a broad understanding of the role and responsibilities of a town or parish clerk. This course is a must for newly appointed clerks, or clerks who feel they could benefit from some formal training. This is a two day course and delegates must attend both days: Day 1 is on Saturday 11 September 2021, and Day 2 is on Saturday 18 September 2021, both 10:00 to 16:00

### Off to a Flying Start **\*\*FULLY BOOKED\*\***

Mon, 13 Sep 2021 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.

### The Different Role Of Town (or Parish) Councillor **\*\*\*NEW\*\*\***

Mon, 13 Sep 2021 19:00

There are key legal and practical differences between being a member of a principal council and being a member of a local council. Much of the legal

framework for the corporate body is the same, but the role of members is very different. This course will outline the key differences, point out the main pitfalls to avoid, and help councillors be most effective in their role on the town or parish council. There will also be plenty of opportunity for questions and interaction.

### **The Different Role Of Town (or Parish) Councillor \*\*\*NEW\*\*\***

Tue, 14 Sep 2021 10:00

As above

### **GDPR Update**

Tue, 21 Sep 2021 17:00

A review of the General Data Protection Regulations 2016 ('GDPR') which became law nearly two years ago on 25 May 2018. It was a radical change for both the public and private sector. Two years on we will ask, what has worked? We will also look at what hasn't worked. We will also review the Data Protection Act 2018 including how to deal with Subject Access Requests.

### **An intro to Employment Law**

Thu, 23 Sep 2021 18:00

Putting a recruitment campaign together, including job adverts, application forms, interview questions and selection process. Checklist for inducting a new Employee, including health and safety requirements. Issuing the right contract, such as permanent, part time, fixed term / casual, zero hours and self-employed. Calculating holiday entitlements. Sickness and Sick Pay. And much more!

### **Freedom of Information and how to deal with Vexatious Requests**

Tue, 28 Sep 2021 10:00

Handling requests under the Freedom of Information Act and Environmental Information Regulations and how to handle vexatious requests. The session will include group exercises and will cover FOI including the section 40 (personal data) exemption, Environmental Information Regulations, and vexatious requests.

For more information on any of the courses mentioned above, and to make a booking please see <https://www.northantscalc.com/training-and-events.html>, and if you would be interested in a training session specifically designed and delivered for your council, please contact Marie Reilly on 01327 831482 or email [mreilly@northantscalc.com](mailto:mreilly@northantscalc.com) to discuss your requirements.

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