

Minutes of a meeting of the Parish Council Liaison Meeting held at the Town Hall on
30 August 2012

MEMBERS PRESENT:

Cllr Irene Walsh (Chairman)
David Roxburgh, Barnack & Pilsgate Parish Council
Pat Murphy, Thorney Parish Council
Michael Chambers, Orton Waterville Parish Council
Ioannis Dermitzakis, Hampton Parish Council
Keith Lievesley, Ufford Parish Council
Brenda Stanojevic, Eye Parish Council
Denis Batty, Glinton Parish Council
John Brookes, Thorney Parish Council
Paul Froggitt, Orton Waterville Parish Council
John Bartlett, Thorney Parish Council
Richard Harris, Bainton & Ashton Parish Council
Graham Fletcher, Bainton & Ashton Parish Council
Anthony Hovell, Newborough & Borough Fen Parish Council
Kate Day, Hampton Parish Council
Joan Pickett, Ailsworth Parish Council
Colin Brown, Ailsworth Parish Council
Alison Brown, Orton Waterville Parish Council
David Ellis, Glinton Parish Council
Bernard Champness, Bretton Parish Council
Ian Dewar, CAPALC
Henry Clark, Peakirk Parish Council
Patricia Stuart-Mogg, Sutton Parish Council

OFFICERS PRESENT:

Kim Sawyer, Head of Legal Services
Mark Emson, Electoral Services Officer

1. Apologies for Absence

Leonie McCarthy, Social Inclusion Manager - Neighbourhoods
Cllr Dale McKean, Eye & Thorney Ward Councillor
Amy Kavanagh, Bretton Parish Council
John Lawrence, Wothorpe Parish Council
Richard Perkins, Ailsworth Parish Council

2. Minutes of Meeting Held on 26 October 2011

The minutes of the meeting held on 26 October 2011 were agreed as a true and accurate record.

3. Standards and Member Complaints

The Head of Legal Services discussed the standards and code of conduct, what it means and outlined the obligations of Parish Councils and also the Principle Authority.

The following key points were highlighted:

Duty under the localism act for every Parish Council to adopt a code of conduct.

Have to have a register of interests and these must be published on both the Parish Council website, where available, and the Principle Authorities website.

Parishes can choose to adopt PCC code (attached to report) which is quite a pared down version compared to the DCLG and NALC versions.

Disclosable Pecuniary Interests (DPI's) form part of the code of conduct and it is a criminal offence to speak or vote at a meeting if you have a DPI and they have not been declared.

Cannot participate in a meeting if you have a DPI unless you have a dispensation in place.

Parish Clerk is responsible for giving dispensations.

PCC are currently looking at introducing a system of blanket dispensations e.g. if a blanket dispensation was put in place in relation to a members employer then that member would always be allowed to speak about matters concerning said employer at a meeting should they arise.

If a complaint is made about a Parish Councillor then it should be made to the Monitoring Officer who will notify the relevant member whom the complaint was made against asking for their side of the story.

If a complaint is referred for investigation it will go through a formal process to see if the code has been breached and may then be referred to the Audit Committee at PCC.

PCC will be recruiting an Independent Person to advise Parish Councillors on complaints should a complaint arise.

Members asked to review the code and come back in nine months to look at any potential changes.

Currently no members of Parish Councils are on the Audit Committee but recommendations can be put to Council if someone would like to be.

The following questions were raised:

Q. Are there any benefits as to which code is adopted?

A. Parish Councils should adopt a code that best suits them although it would be easier if everybody was working off the same code. CAPALC also advised that it would be much clearer if Parish Councils adopted their Principle Authorities code.

Q. If Parish Councils decide to adopt the PCC code would they be able to submit draft recommendations for amendments?

A. The Head of Legal Services advised that she was more than happy to receive recommendations for amendments and encouraged Parish Councils to be part of the review process if the PCC code is adopted.

Q. How long do Parish Councils have to adopt the Code?

A. A date has not been imposed in legislation although The Head of Legal Services recommended that a code should be adopted sooner rather than later.

Q. What guidelines are there for the Parish Clerk with regards to dispensation?

A. There are no criteria set out in the act. DPI's should be submitted to the Parish Clerk in writing in advance of meetings. If a vote is to take place at a meeting then the Parish Clerk should look stringently at members DPI's.

Q. If a member has a DPI are they able to participate in the meeting?

A. Yes, they will only be excluded from the relevant item on the agenda.

Q. If a complaint about a member is received by a Parish Clerk should this be investigated by the Parish Council to begin with?

A. CAPALC advises that, wherever possible, the Parish Council should investigate the complaint in the first instance to see if they can resolve it.

Q. If a complaint is upheld and the Parish Council had to foot the cost of the investigation, would the Parish Council have to include this for that years budget estimates?

A. The code will be allowed to run for six months and then reviewed over three months so a decision will be made then.

Q. Do Parish Councillors have to submit a DPI for their spouse or partner?

A. You are required by law to declare your interests and those of your spouse or partner. When your interests are published they will not distinguish between which are your own and those which are your partners/spouses.

Due to Data Protection issues no members signatures should appear on websites when the interests are published.

Q. Would it be easier for PCC to issue a standard template of the code for all Parishes so that everybody is working from the same document?

A. PCC are happy to issue a standard template.

The Chair asked the members present if this was something that they would like to take forward and the general consensus was that having a standard template issued was a good idea.

Q. Could the Register of Interest forms be made to distinguish between the interests of a member and those of their spouse or partner?

A. It is for the Parish Council to decide how the interests appear although if they were to distinguish between the interests of a member and those of their spouse or partner then written consent from the spouse or partner would be required.

Q. If a Parish Council does not have a website how would they go about publishing their DPI's?

A. The act requires that the information is still published on the Principle Authorities website.

Action agreed

It was agreed that a draft template of the code of conduct would be issued to all Parish Councils for review.

4. Parish Council Conference

The Chair discussed with the meeting the upcoming Parish Council Conference taking place at the Kingsgate Conference Centre in Parnwell on 23 October 2012. The Chair strongly urged members to attend the Parish Council Conference which would cover various topics including:

- What localism means to Parish Councils
- What should the role of the Parish Council Liaison be and how can it work alongside Neighbourhood Committees
- How can we do things differently
- Provocative speakers will be attending to discuss items followed by round table/workshops

The Chair explained that items 5, 6 and 7 on the agenda will be put into place as part of the Parish Council Conference.

The Chair advised that the Leader of the Council will be attending the conference.

19:28
CHAIRMAN