

TOWN & PARISH COUNCIL SURVEY AND IMPROVEMENT PLAN

To: Communities and Partnership Committee

Meeting Date: 6 July 2017

From: Councillor Steve Criswell: Chairman Communities and Partnership Committee

Diane Lane: Community Engagement Manager

Electoral division(s): All excluding Cambridge City

Forward Plan ref: Not applicable Key decision: No

Purpose: To present the findings of the Town & Parish Council Survey and the intention to produce a 5 year Improvement Plan in partnership with Parish Councils, District Councils and Support Organisations.

Recommendation: Communities and Partnership Committee is asked:

- a) To consider the findings of the survey and the implications for Cambridgeshire County Council.**
- b) To consider key actions the Committee would like to commit to as part of the Improvement Plan**

| <i>Officer contact:</i> | |
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1. BACKGROUND

- 1.1 Meaningful and successful working with Parish Councils is an essential element of the County Council's future. Parishes hold some of the closest relationships with the communities that we need – and are banking on – to do more to help people stay independent and healthy for longer. The [Localism Act 2011](#) and the [Cities and Local Government Devolution Act 2016](#), gives Town and Parish Council new opportunities for their communities.
- 1.2 As a Council, it has been recognised that our relationship with the 238 Town and Parish Councils in Cambridgeshire can be patchy and needs to be strengthened. We see our work with Parishes as an important relationship. To that end, over the last year:
- Members have begun to initiate activity in their own divisions, sometimes in relation to the Councillors as Community Connectors programme, others of their own accord. For example, bringing together Parishes to buy Speedwatch equipment, developing TimeBanks, Health and Wellbeing Networks and Village Hubs.
 - Support Cambridgeshire, a partnership between Hunts Forum, Cambridge Council for Voluntary Service and Cambridgeshire ACRE (Action in Communities in Rural England), has been commissioned to build the capacity of community groups, voluntary organisations and Parish Councils.
 - The first countywide Parish Council Conference was held in November 2016 to explore how all tiers of government and the voluntary sector could work better together for the good of Cambridgeshire residents, around the conference theme of 'Stronger Together'. Nine projects were showcased by Parish Councils in the workshops and eighty-five ideas were shared between participants. 159 people attended and feedback showed that 94% of people would attend again.
 - The conference was led by Cambridgeshire ACRE, as part of Support Cambridgeshire, in partnership with Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Local Council Association (CAPALC) and Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Society for Local Council Clerks (SLCC), Parish Councils and District Councils. This event really helped cement this Stakeholder Partnership, which has since developed a joint service directory, supported two peer learning events and shaped the Parish Council survey. Organisations are working together to align support and engagement so it is clearer for Parish Councils. The National Association of Local Councils believe this is the first partnership of its kind in the country.

2. KEY SURVEY FINDINGS

- 2.1 In order to understand the current position of the Town and Parish Council Sector in Cambridgeshire, two parallel surveys – one for Clerks and the other for Councillors – were run during early 2017. A total of 130 responses were received from Clerks, accounting for 55% of the 238 Town and Parish Councils or Parish Meetings invited to take part. A total of 372 surveys from Councillors were returned with responses being received from 130 of the

Councils invited to take part, giving a Council return rate of 55% too. The results have given much insight to the issues faced by Town and Parish Councils.

2.2 The key findings from the Town and Parish Councillors survey were:

- Councillors are mostly from an older age range with concerns about finding younger people to take their place.
- Not all Councillors have read and understood their clerks' job description and a quarter state they understand the role of the clerk 'very poorly'.
- Half of Councillors say there are gaps in their knowledge and there are sometimes challenges with the decisions they are asked to make.
- Fewer than half of Councillors received a formal induction into their role and a quarter have received no formal training.
- Over a quarter of Councillors have never received any training.
- 86% of Councillors would be prepared to undertake training or further training to better equip them for their role.
- Councillors are unsure which support organisations they are members of.
- Councillors have low use of social media which is increasingly used to communicate.
- Councillors see limited value in the Local Council Award Scheme with many showing lack of awareness of the scheme.

2.3 The key findings from the Clerks survey were:

- Just over half of Clerks feel they have gaps in their knowledge and sometimes feel challenged by tasks asked of them.
- Fewer than half of Clerks received a formal induction into their role and only half of the Clerks received a regular performance review.
- Over half of the Clerks feel Councillors do not have a particularly good understanding of the role they perform.
- Over half of the Clerks are not members of SLCC and lack knowledge and understanding of what SLCC does.
- Clerks have low usage of social media which is increasingly used to communicate.
- Clerks see limited value in the Local Council Award Scheme and feel the work it involves gives no longer term benefit.
- Half of the Clerks feel their contracted hours are not sufficient to carry out the work required of them.
- Just over half of the Clerks are not CILCA (Certificate in Local Council Administration) Qualified but, of those not qualified only half would consider undertaking the necessary training.

2.4 The final part of each survey sought to identify the future challenges local councils face and explored the readiness of the local council sector to address these challenges. Some common themes have emerged, including:

- Devolution of services from County and District Councils versus lack of resources within Parishes and also devolution without adequate support.
- Budget savings at other local authorities which have an impact on parish life, lack of funding, the challenge of balancing budgets and keeping precepts down.

- Lack of support from District and County Councils due to budget savings and change of policies.
- Planning and Local Plan concerns including pressure for more housing, meeting government building targets and associated infrastructure. Neighbourhood planning and large scale housing development alongside the infrastructure implications of development. Loss of the rural nature of communities due to over-development.
- Issues with Councillors including understanding of the role, the quality of Councillors, training, a sense that people have hidden agendas, pressure on filling vacancies and retaining members, apathy and unwillingness from people to stand for the position of Councillor, finding people prepared to stand as Parish Councillors and the Councillor workload.
- Relationship building and engagement with wider (seemingly apathetic and uninvolved) community and engaging the public and finding volunteers.
- Increased demands from members of the public.
- Communications with County and District Councils.
- Highways issues including road safety, speeding, traffic control and street lighting.

2.5 The full results for each survey, along with district-based reports, are available to download from the Cambridgeshire Town and Parish Council website:
<http://www.cambsparishes.wordpress.com>

2.6 Town and Parish Councils are aware of the greater responsibility for delivering improvements in their own communities. There is an unquestionable need to strengthen support, engagement and collaboration between Local Authorities, sector-specific organisations and the voluntary sector to support Town and Parish Council ambitions for their communities.

3.0 **NEXT STEPS - PRODUCING AN IMPROVEMENT PLAN**

3.1 In order to address the findings from the surveys, the Stakeholder Partnership is drafting an improvement plan, the first of its kind in Cambridgeshire that sets out our collective aspirations for Cambridgeshire's Town and Parish Council Sector. This will help support the aspirations of the National Association of Local Councils (NALC) and the National Improvement Strategy for Parish and Town Councils (2017 – 2022) by providing a focus for the support for all Cambridgeshire Town and Parish Councils, drawing upon the national expertise, training and programmes offered through NALC, the Society of Local Council Clerks (SLCC) and the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG).

3.2 The Town and Parish Council Surveys of both Clerks and Councillors will be repeated every two years to measure improvement and change and to allow us to evaluate the impact and success of our overall collaborative approach. A 'How will we know we have been successful?' element of the improvement plan will set social impact measurements across all areas of improvement agreed by partners.

3.3 Increased engagement with the sector will help with the development of better datasets that will provide a more in-depth understanding of successes and the targeting of advice and support. A measure of success will be the increased reach of all Town and Parish Councils and their ability to be proactive and to engage with those not currently engaging in the support available. Other measures of success include the monitoring of the use of powers

given under the Localism Act 2012 such as Neighbourhood Planning, Community Rights and devolved services.

3.4 The improvement plan will be resourced through:

- A part-time Town and Parish Council Development Officer, employed by Cambridgeshire ACRE, who facilitates the Stakeholder Partnership funded by Cambridgeshire County Council through Support Cambridgeshire.
- Cambridgeshire ACRE membership fees and a Defra grant to improve and sustain rural services through Rural Community Council with funding until August 2019 in the first instance.
- Aligning resources already available and increasing their effectiveness by working in partnership. For example, a comprehensive training programme for Councillors and Clerks is already established and delivered by CAPALC; District Councils often hold advice, training and networking meetings at a District level; SLCC supports Clerks through training; and Cambridgeshire ACRE has connected community-based programmes and runs a neighbourhood planning service. Many other locally and nationally based voluntary organisations, working in Cambridgeshire, offer useful practical advice across a range of specialisms that support community well-being. By aligning these existing partner resources the aim is to improve the overall effectiveness and efficiency in Town and Parish council support as well as to provide clarity as to what provision is available and how it can be accessed.

3.5 The improvement plan will also include new untested work which is currently not funded. Partners will work together to seek further funding to support this and to increase the overall support available.

3.6 A new website (<http://www.cambsparishes.wordpress.com>) has been launched to give improved access to information, resources and a calendar for events and training that all partners are running. Social media (Twitter @cambsparishes and Facebook) will be used to drive forward a better networked online community of Town and Parish Councils.

3.7 The County Council will be committing to a number of actions in the improvement plan, including work to:

- Improve communications through a bi-monthly e-newsletter that will promote this work and relevant County Council news- timescales and content to be reviewed with Parishes after 6 – 8 months.
- Improve communications with regard to supporting improvement in health and ensure that they have access to appropriate health related information and resources.
- Strengthen relationships between County Councillors and Parish Councils through the Councillors as Community Connectors programme.
- Join up our Parish Council engagement work with District Councils wherever possible.

- 3.8 It is intended that the final draft of the Improvement Plan is presented to this Committee prior to the launch at the Cambridgeshire Town and Parish Council Conference on 17 November 2017.

4. ALIGNMENT WITH CORPORATE PRIORITIES

4.1 Developing the local economy for the benefit of all

The following bullet point sets out details of implications identified by officers:

- A number of Town and Parish Councils already have links with local businesses and support schemes that help people develop their skills. This work will support those Town and Parish Councils who are keen to do the same.

4.2 Helping people live healthy and independent lives

The following sets out implications identified by officers:

- A number of Town and Parish Councils already deliver work that supports people to lead healthy and independent lives. This work will support those Town and Parish Councils who are keen to do the same.

4.3 Supporting and protecting vulnerable people

The following bullet point sets out details of implications identified by officers:

- A number of Town and Parish Councils already deliver work that supports and protects vulnerable people. This work will support those Town and Parish Councils who are keen to do the same.

5. SIGNIFICANT IMPLICATIONS

5.1 Resource Implications

The report above sets out the implications of this in paragraph 3.4. County Council resources for this work are already identified in the Council's budget for 2017/18.

5.2 Statutory, Risk and Legal Implications

The following bullet point sets out details of significant implications identified by officers:

- There is a continuing legal duty on local authorities to ensure that vulnerable people are not exposed to additional or unreasonable levels of risk as a result of the implementation of these strategic objectives;

5.3 Equality and Diversity Implications

The following bullet points overleaf set out details of significant implications identified by officers:

- Evidence indicates that some services delivered within local communities can be more successful than statutory services at reaching people who may need support. Building capacity within local communities to help people help each other should therefore support more equal and diverse accessible provision locally;
- Some of our services will become increasingly more localised, so that we can meet local and individual need within each specific community context;
- This work will help to address issues of rural isolation.

5.4 Engagement and Consultation Implications

The following bullet point sets out details of significant implications identified by officers :

- Successful delivery of all aspects of the delivery plan will only be possible with significant community engagement and engagement with our partners and with County Council staff.

5.5 Localism and Local Member Involvement

The following bullet point sets out details of significant implications identified by officers:

- The role of Members is crucial to help build relationships with Town and Parish Councils.

5.6 Public Health Implications

The following bullet point sets out details of significant implications identified by officers:

- A number of Town and Parish Councils already deliver work that supports the adoption of a healthy lifestyle and builds engagement in health improving initiatives. This work will support those Town and Parish Councils who are keen to do the same.

| Implications | Officer Clearance |
|---|---|
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| Have the resource implications been cleared by Finance? | Yes Name of Financial Officer: Tom Kelly |
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| Has the impact on Statutory, Legal and Risk implications been cleared by LGSS Law? | N/A |
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| Are there any Equality and Diversity implications? | Yes Name of Officer: Sue Grace |
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| Have any engagement and communication implications been cleared by Communications? | Yes Name of Officer: Christine Birchall |

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| Are there any Localism and Local Member involvement issues? | Yes Name: Cllr Criswell, Chairman of Communities and Partnership Committee |
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| Have any Public Health implications been cleared by Public Health | Yes Name of Officer: Val Thomas |

| Source Documents | Location |
|--|---|
| Town and Parish Council Survey Results Report 2017 | http://www.cambsparishes.wordpress.com |
| The Localism Act 2011 | http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2011/20/contents/enacted |
| Cities and Local Government Devolution Act 2016 | http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2016/1/contents/enacted/data.htm |
| The National Improvement Strategy for Parish and Town Councils (2017 – 2022) | http://www.nalc.gov.uk/library/our-work/2192-draft-improvement-strategy-consultation-october-16/file |