

MINUTES OF THE PARISH LIAISON MEETING
Thursday 25th September 2008

Present: Mrs G Simkiss, Clerk to Breedon-on-the-Hill Parish Council
 Fiona Palmer, Clerk to Castle Donington Parish Council
 Brian Duncombe, Clerk to Swannington and Charley Parish Councils
 Rosie McConachie, Clerk to Packington Parish Council
 Jan Shepherd, Clerk to Heather Parish Council
 Sarah Wallace, Clerk to Ellistown and Battleflat Parish Council
 Paul Pugsley, Chairman of Swebstone Parish Council
 Tim Heeley, Leicestershire County Council (TH)
 Norman Bird, Chairman of the Standards Committee (NB)

Officers: Elizabeth Warhurst, Head of Legal and Democratic Services/Monitoring Officer (EW), Elizabeth Wilson, Interim Head of Place Shaping (EWil), Jane Cotton, Legal Services Manager/Deputy Monitoring Officer (JC), Melanie Phillips, Democratic Services Manager (MP), and Sabrina Newton, Senior Democratic Services Officer/Parish Liaison Officer (SN).

Apologies: Andrea Robinson, Clerk to Ashby Woulds Town Council
 Dawn Roach, Clerk to Measham Parish Council
 Lesley Pendleton, Clerk to Kegworth Parish Council,
 Doug Maas, Clerk to Long Whatton and Diseworth Parish Council
 Lynn Simms, Clerk to Osgathorpe Parish Council

| Minute No. | Detail | Responsible Officer, Action & Time Line |
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| 1. | <p>INTRODUCTIONS EW thanked everyone for attending the meeting and introduced the officers and speakers.</p> | |
| 2. | <p>MINUTES AGREED: That the minutes be approved as a correct record.</p> | |
| 3. | <p>MATTERS ARISING FROM THE MINUTES EW stated that the matter of communication with the parishes was being looked at as part of the place shaping agenda. A report had been taken through the Statutory Officers Group and then onto the Corporate Leadership Team (CLT). This report had identified the current practices and looked at possibilities for improvements. This work had been endorsed by CLT and passed to the new interim Head of Place Shaping. EWil stated that the work she was looking at was not just about communications but also about engagement.</p> | |
| 4. | <p>PARISH WEBSITES SN introduced Tim Heeley, Website Content Co-ordinator from Leicestershire County Council. It was explained that TH was involved with a project to establish a website for all parishes, both councils and meetings, so that there would be one place containing the definitive information about parishes in Leicestershire. TH gave a presentation about the work he did and detailed some of the statistics for the district (copy attached to the minutes). Most of the Parish Councils already had a website through the County Council but there were a number of the Parish Meetings which had not signed up. TH explained that the service and training was free and, for those who felt they couldn't have a website because they weren't confident with</p> | |

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| | <p>their IT skills, he was able to provide a service whereby he added the content on behalf of the parish. All they had to do was supply the information.</p> <p>He also explained that the District Council could register for a website to use as a means of publicising news or events etc in addition to their own website.</p> <p>In response to a query TH confirmed that he did not deal with the County and District/Borough Council websites as well. It was commented by the clerks that they found the County and District websites difficult to navigate and consequently did not use them to find information as often as they perhaps could. TH agreed to feed this back to the website administrators at the County Council.</p> | <p style="text-align: center;">TH</p> |
| <p>5.</p> | <p>STANDARDS COMMITTEE & INFORMATION FROM STANDARDS BOARD FOR ENGLAND CONFERENCE</p> <p>EW introduced Norman Bird, Chairman of the District Council's Standards Committee.</p> <p>NB gave a presentation (copy attached to the minutes) on the role of the Standards Committee and outlined the changes that had taken place to implement the Local Determination of complaints process. He explained that the committee was trying to be pro-active to stop complaints by delivering training to the parishes and had also introduced for the new financial year a new method of reporting so that trends could be spotted and training targeted more effectively.</p> <p>He referred to item 9 on the agenda and the slides entitled "The Parish Perspective". He stated that the presentation highlighted some of the issues and outlined strategies for dealing with these. He wanted to make sure that the clerks were aware that support was available for them from the District Council when dealing with complaints and code of conduct issues. He wanted to focus on getting clerks up to speed on the code of conduct so that they felt comfortable dealing with any issues that arose.</p> <p>EW added that there would be Code of Conduct training rolled out to the Parishes shortly and this was being co-ordinated by SN.</p> <p>It was suggested, and all generally agreed that it would be beneficial for Clerks to receive training on how to deal with a complaint once it was submitted, eg who they could talk to about it, what the process was etc.</p> | <p style="text-align: center;">SN</p> <p style="text-align: center;">EW</p> |
| <p>6.</p> | <p>QUALITY PARISH COUNCILS SCHEME</p> <p>Rosie McConachie led the discussion and explained about the scheme and the process for achieving quality status. There were only 2 clerks within the district which had achieved the CiLCA qualification which took approximately 40 hours to complete and was essential to achieve quality status. There was also the potential to study for a Certificate in Higher Education in Local Policy. Rosie had embarked upon this and there were 4 other clerks in Leicestershire who had achieved this.</p> <p>The scheme was about trying to make things better for the local community by demonstrating a standard of operation, there was no direct monetary gain to be had from achieving quality status.</p> <p>Rosie stated that, whilst the scheme was good at raising the standards to a certain point, Parishes were still held back by the laws governing</p> | |

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| | <p>them which were out of date. For example, agendas could not be emailed to Councillors and they could not do online payments.</p> <p>Unfortunately, due to the amount of time taken to gain quality status, there were few parish councils willing to commit to achieving it and the clerks did not have enough time to do it unless they were willing to do it in their own time as she had done.</p> <p>It was queried whether having quality status had an effect on receiving grant funding. Rosie stated that it hadn't in her experience and she had never heard of anyone being refused a grant because they didn't have the quality mark.</p> | |
| 7. | <p>TRAINING</p> <p>Fiona Palmer had requested this item on the agenda as her Parish had been promised training on a number of occasions on Planning and the Forward Plan set up. She stated that Leicester City Council often invited parishes on their internal training courses, eg VAT training, and wondered if the District Council would consider doing the same.</p> <p>EW stated that it was very rare that the District Council ran in-house courses but it would be possible to look at bespoke courses specifically for the parishes.</p> <p>With regards to planning matters it was stated that clerks needed to know how to comment on planning applications so that their comments would be taken into account. It was confirmed that LRALC did not offer much training about Planning as it was different in each district. One of the problems was that the clerks felt that the planners did not listen to them but the clerks were unaware of the Council's point of view in terms of material considerations and the policies etc. There were also issues about basic knowledge such as the difference between a full and outline application and reserved matters. Clerks felt that they did not receive much assistance from the planning officers when asking for explanations.</p> <p>It was suggested that access to an online book/flowchart outlining the process would be beneficial and also to issue a 'tick sheet' so that parish councillors would know which policies to look at for each application. EWil suggested that the District Council could develop a training session processing a mock application and then do a feedback session at the end. She agreed to draft some ideas for 2/3 events and circulate these to the clerks present for comments prior to organising the events during June/July.</p> <p>This approach was welcomed but it was further commented that information on conservation areas and listed buildings would be beneficial as would the opportunity for Parishes to be involved with Section 106 agreements. The new Community Infrastructure Levy which was coming in was mentioned and it was requested that information about this be passed down to the parishes.</p> | EWil |
| 8. | <p>QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS ON MONITORING OFFICER ISSUES</p> <p>No questions were raised.</p> | |
| 9. | <p>DATE OF NEXT MEETING</p> <p>It was agreed that the next meeting be held in 6 months time, date to be arranged.</p> | SN |

The meeting closed at 8.55pm.