

Little Brook Ward Meeting

Held on Monday, 22nd July 2019 at 7.30pm in Evenley Village Hall

Present

Evenley Parish Council

Chairman Cathy Ellis
Cllr Jeff Peyton-Bruhl
Cllr Charles Reader
Cllr Sue Ricketts
Mrs Cathy Knott (Clerk)

Croughton Parish Council

Cllr Penny Forbes
Cllr Jean Coles
Mrs Ann Le Druillenec (clerk)

Aynho Parish Council

Chairman Leslie Leighton
Cllr David Dean
Cllr Stephen Brook
Cllr Jeremy James
Cllr J Clinch
Mr Chris Wilson (clerk)

District Councillor John Townsend, SNC
Mr Danny Moody, Chief Executive, NCALC

1. Welcome

Chairman Cathy Ellis welcomed everyone and thanked them for attending.

2. To receive apologies

Apologies were received from: Cllr Rebecca Breese, NCC and RAF Croughton.

Evenley Parish Council

Cllr Mike Baul
Cllr Spencer Burnham
Cllr Jean Morgan

Croughton Parish Council

Cllr Rodger James
Chairman Chris Fox

Aynho Parish Council

Cllr Fi Burge
Cllr Andy Anderson
Cllr Rachel Moroney
Cllr Chris Reynolds

3. To Approve the Minutes of the Ward meeting hosted by Croughton Parish Council on 28th January 2019

It was agreed to approve the Minutes.

4. Matters arising

No matters arising.

5. To receive reports:

County Councillor Rebecca Breese, NCC

NCC managed to close last years books off with a small reported underspend. This was as a result of the tight spending controls instigated by the Sec 114 notices and the capitalisation of the overspend that was allowed as a one-off dispensation by central government for last year.

This year's budget is still challenged with a budgeted deficit that is being worked on by officers and Commissioners. It is anticipated that this will lead to difficult decisions later in the year. The costs, particularly in children's services continue to exercise minds. The nationwide shortage of skilled social workers, willing to work in children's services, is challenging local authorities everywhere, making permanent appointments to vacant posts very difficult. In tandem with this the recruitment of foster parents in the county must accelerate to control the costs of out of county placements.

The commissioners describe the overall financial situation at the county as stable but fragile.

Attention is being focussed now on other underperforming services where significant improvements in provision are required before the unitaries take over. Services like highways, environmental, emergency planning and trading standards are being overhauled.

Children's services are being hived off into a children's trust. A children's trust will be a delivery body, that will operate independently of the councils. The trust will have a board, its own chief executive, and will deliver the unitary's vision. The secretary of state for education decided that there should be the one trust which will serve both unitaries, who will both pay for the running costs. The secretary of state does not think that two smaller trusts would be viable, as in children services, delivery very much depends on capacity and so the ministry of housing, communities and local government (MHCLG), the decision was made to delay the creation of the two unitaries to enable the trust to be created without having to go through a disaggregation process. Creation of the trust will take about 15 months, possibly less and the department of education will meet most of the reasonable costs.

LGR

The decision of the secretary of state at MHCLG to proceed with the winding up of the eight councils and the creation of two unitaries was much delayed but finally announced in May. The formal process of creating a new council lies in the laying of a structural change order and it is within this order the structure of the new councils and their shadow councils are set out. It was initially anticipated that we would be going into a shadow council about now with existing members all becoming shadow councillors and new councillors being elected straight to the new authorities in May next year. However, with the delay, the elections next year will elect shadow councillors (93 – three for each division) who will then become unitary councillors in 2021 when vesting day occurs. The change in timescales means the new shadow councils will be responsible for adopting their own policies, appointment of lead officers and setting a budget. Overall a much better arrangement I think than the proposed arrangement of unelected shadow councillors doing this role. As the shadow council will have no power to deliver services until vesting day 2021, the county council and the districts and boroughs will continue to operate services until that date.

It was anticipated that the structural change order would be laid about now, but with the continuing Brexit uncertainty, a possible cabinet reshuffle, imminent summer recess almost immediately after a new prime minister takes office, it may be that the secretary of state is delayed again in order to fully brief a new secretary of state. This has ramifications for the preparation towards new councils as until there is certainty, preparatory work can only really advance in collection of information and data and not in designing the new services. In order to keep costs as under control as can be, the first phases of preparing for unitary are being done under an integrated model serving north and west, until such time as they must go their separate ways in order to achieve their own requirements. Apart from children's services, the default position agreed amongst the councils is that all services will be hived off into two, and how they are reconfigured will be for each unitary with the overarching transformation programme in mind.

District Councillor John Townsend, SNC

We are going through a very challenging time in both local and national politics and people are feeling very uneasy at the moment. Because of the local re-organisation, I will be carrying on with my term which has become extended to six years instead of four, but I am pleased to say that I am back on the planning committees.

Officers are finding it very difficult during this uncertain time as big changes are happening and lots of very experienced people are leaving which is very unsettling. However, I am very proud of what we have achieved in South Northants.

I am pleased that leaders have agreed there needs to be a written record of the formation of South Northamptonshire fifty years ago and they are commissioning someone to write about it. I remember being involved in the designing of the route of the M40; it was a brilliant example of everyone working together so that it didn't divide the villages.

The role of parish and town councils will now be vital. You will have to shout louder and make your voices heard and I think it will be difficult getting people to stand in the elections next year.

The district council is currently working on two policies; a housing policy and a leisure policy, with an emphasis on

fitness and obesity, encouraging town and parish councils to make their community spaces available for overseeing this.

The government has changed the rules again on the five-year land supply (under the definition of change) and Northampton will suffer because of this.

Questions & answers

Q/ What is happening regarding the local plan part 2a?

A/ We are waiting to hear back from the Inspector if the report has been agreed and can be adopted. Once adopted, it is expected the new authority will work with the plan for the first two years before producing a new plan.

Q/ It has taken five years to agree on this plan; why will it only last two years?

A/ The last plan put together in 1997 lasted 20 years so it is quite frustrating; we just have to work with it.

Q/ The new organisation is 60% Northampton. What's to stop them trampling all over us?

A/ Nothing! When the shadow elections take place, we'll have more of an idea. If there is a conservative majority, rural areas will have more of a say but if there is a labour majority, work will be more concentrated in urban areas.

Danny Moody advised there is a fear of the unknown. However, Milton Keynes is a unitary authority with Milton Keynes in the middle of a large rural area. Villages in the borough haven't been trampled all over – there are vast assets in the countryside including tourism, motorsport and housing.

Q/ When is the deadline for the separation of Cherwell and SNC?

A/ There is a programme of separation in progress to fade out Cherwell.

Danny Moody, Chief Executive, Northants CALC

Over the last six months, the county council have made a good job of saying "we were going down the tubes but we're turning it round; we're in control". It's not true; the reality is that they have stabilised the current financial position but they still need to save £40 million this year. It is indeed in an extremely fragile position.

There are three main issues for town and parish councils to be concerned about:

Timings

Unfortunately, parish councils will be setting their budgets before hearing about what services the county council expect them to take responsibility for. I am meeting with Northants Highways in August and will impress upon them to let us know of any changes ASAP so that we are all better prepared.

Capacity

Some councillors are running out of puff and have been in place for five years now. This will create a lot of vacancies. During a normal election year, 20 – 30 % of councillors will resign. Next year I think it will be more like 40 – 50 %. Close of nominations is the end of March 2020 and parish councils should be thinking about what they need to do to promote and attract more people to the role of councillor and should think about launching a campaign in the new year at the latest.

Clerks will have new/bigger roles and if parish councils are expected to be doing more, they need the capacity to do more. You will therefore need to review the clerks' hours and pay.

Health and wellbeing

A lot is happening in the creation of primary care networks. Doctors surgeries are grouping together 30 – 50,000 patients and attaching them to a social/community connector. This role will sit between health bodies, voluntary community services and town and parish councils. They will be looking at social prescribing which is often a better way of treating a patient instead of prescribing drugs. The council is mapping services that already exist (such as fitness classes, village allotments and coffee mornings) and looking at what it can add additionally.

With the imminent changes coming, Northants CALC feels it is crucial to create a 'community partnerships office' which will provide a link between the unitary councils, town and parish councils and the voluntary services.

We hope to bolt roles onto the side of this including a grant providing officer amongst others.

Questions & answers

Q/ With more responsibilities going to town and parish councils, parishioners will have to pay more precept. How should we approach this?

A/ Parish councils will need to work out whether to let the service go or to increase the precept. They will need to consult with parishioners to get a majority view.

6. Parish Council News

Aynho Parish Council:

Streetlights

Our principal concern is replacing streetlights so that we can lower our energy usage. We are almost ready to apply for a public works loan. Once the streetlights are replaced, we will look into electricity contractors.

Electric cars

A discussion ensued on the issues of providing charging points for electric cars. It was felt that the practicalities around this will be hard to overcome and people are not convinced this is the way forward.

Community support

We carried out a survey but had a very poor response. An informal good neighbourhood scheme is running in the background and we don't see a need to formalise it as long as its working.

Village bus

The funding of the bus service is working well with King Sutton paying for the bulk of it.

Croughton Parish Council:

Traffic

We are still suffering with ongoing traffic problems through the village involving anti-social drivers, bad driving and speeding drivers. The parish council is meeting again with Helen Howard, Northants Highways to discuss ways of managing this better.

Evenly Parish Council:

Streetlights

Our replacement programme is now complete.

Land and green spaces

We have successfully purchased a piece of land from South Northants Homes which we have put trees on. Cathy E has recently attended a course on green space which was very useful.

Grants

We have been successful with a road safety grant for a chicane on Broad Lane to help with traffic calming. This should be installed before Spring next year.

We are applying to HS2 CEF (as a village) for various things including gates to replace stiles, a bus stop more in keeping with the village and a village sign.

We are in the process of applying to the Road Safety Community Fund for a solar panel to power our current VAS and a new VAS on Bicester Hill.

Village issues

Our last speed watch session generated 129 police warning letters. Speeding is an ongoing issue. All data can be found on our website at: <http://www.evenleypc.org.uk/county/speedwatch.html>

We continue to be plagued by traffic diversions but feel we are finally getting through to Highways England.

The village Green is becoming eroded and we can't get funding for curbing. Any thoughts on protecting it will be gratefully received.

Over the last few months, we have had issues with a tank from 'Tanks-a-lot' driving around Charlton Road and leaving a terrible churned up mess in its wake. The police don't appear to be interested but the clerk has contacted Helen Howard (Northants Highways) who has written to Tanks-a-lot. Cllr John Townsend agreed to mention it at SNC. Once the clerk has received an update from Helen, she will contact the police again.

7. To discuss the possibility of joining a PCSO share scheme

A discussion ensued on whether it might benefit the parish to share a PCSO. All three councils agreed not to pursue this further mainly due to the cost.

8. To discuss ideas for celebrating and commemorating the 75th anniversary of VE Day on Friday 8th May 2020

Cathy Ellis (EPC) advised that the bank holiday has been changed next May in order that events can take place on the anniversary of VE Day, and asked what other villages are doing to note this very special occasion. Croughton PC and Aynho PC advised that they don't plan to do anything but said if the occasion is marked in their villages, it will be by other organisations.

9. HS2 update

Cathy Ellis (EPC) advised that Kier have signed contracts and it is full steam ahead with work carrying on in the area; however mixed messages are coming through via various media channels.

10. Prospectus for change if not covered by cllrs Breese and Townsend

Covered in item five.

11. Date of next meeting to be held in Aynho

It was agreed to meet on Monday 27th January 2020.

The meeting closed at 9.00 pm and refreshments were served.

DRAFT