

Update

ISSUE 6/23

November - December 2023

CONTENTS

- **THE CHIEF'S BRIEF**
- **CERTIFICATE IN LOCAL COUNCIL ADMINISTRATION**
- **MPs & STAR COUNCILS**
- **ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE**
- **YES MINISTER**
- **76TH ANNUAL CONFERENCE**
- **LOCAL COUNCILS AND CHURCH GRANTS**
- **COMMUNITY PAYBACK**
- **DOES YOUR COUNCIL SUFFER FROM 'SOCIAL LOAFING'?**
- **CHIEF EXEC DESIGNATE**
- **TAKE ME TO YOUR LEADER**
- **ROYAL IMAGES**
- **A CAUTIONARY TALE**
- **SITUATIONS VACANT**
- **TRAINING AND DEVELOPMENT FOR LOCAL COUNCILS**
- **CHRISTMAS CLOSING**
- **NORTHANTS CALC CONTACTS**

THE CHIEF'S BRIEF

By Danny Moody, Chief Executive, Northants CALC

'Tis the season to be jolly! Which is timely because I think we could all do with a little bit of cheer and glad tidings! Soon we will be looking forward to 2024 and all the hope and promise that a new year brings. 2023 probably won't live long in the collective memory, aside from perhaps the King's Coronation, and England's run to the final of the Women's World Cup.

Very stupidly, I reported in the last *eUpdate* that "*August was slightly quieter at Northants CALC*". Consequently, Sod's Law has restored the equilibrium and the last few months have been absolutely crazy. I know never again to say that it's been quieter! As well as a significantly increased number of enquiries in September, October, and November, autumn is always annual conference season, with our own on the first Saturday in October, the Annual Conference of the Society of Local Council Clerks (SLCC) in mid-October, and the AGM and Conference of the National Association of Local Councils (NALC) in the last week in October. The annual conferences are a useful "line in the sand" and they provide an opportunity to step back and see the wood, not the trees. There's an article about the 76th Northants CALC Annual Conference below.

"...Late autumn and into winter is a time that parish and town councils demonstrate their community leadership role..."

Autumn is always a useful time for a formal catch up with the Leaders of the unitary councils, and I met Jason Smithers in Corby at the end of October, and Jonathan Nunn in Northampton at the beginning of November. The contrast between the meetings was interesting and, again, there is a report below.

Late autumn and into winter is a time that parish and town councils demonstrate their community leadership role, with fireworks displays on or near 5 November, and then Remembrance services, parades, and events on or near 11 November. I follow many parish and town councils on social media (mainly on X, Facebook, and LinkedIn) and it is amazing to see the effort that goes into putting on these events for the public. The importance of the community coming together in

shared participation, whether for celebration or commemoration, cannot be underestimated. Often such events are inclusive, multigenerational, and multicultural and can really help to cement community identity and cohesion. The money spent is not a frippery or an indulgence, rather it is a sound investment in the community's health and wellbeing.

The Northants CALC annual board meeting also takes place in November. The chair of the board is elected annually and can be re-elected for up to three years. Chair for the past three years, Mike Scott, who is chair of Great Addington Parish Council, stepped down at the end of his three-year term, and the board unanimously elected as the new chair Lynn Lavender, who is clerk to Ashton Parish Council and RFO at Hartwell Parish Council. In taking the chair, Lynn thanked Mike for his work over the past three years in his capacity as chair and as the National Association of Local Councils (NALC) National Assembly representative for Northants CALC. The board meeting also welcome Kate Houlihan to the team. Kate is clerk to Far Cotton & Delapre Community Council and was appointed as the newest board member at the Association's AGM on 7 October 2023. You can read about the eight directors, who are all clerks or councillors from member councils at <https://tinyurl.com/aabtu49x>.

Our training and development programme has been in full swing since the start of September and I would like to pay tribute to Marie Reilly, our Training Manager, for the incredible range and quality of courses and briefings provided. I would also like to thank all the councillors and clerks who consume the training courses and events offered. Training is not mandatory for parish and town councillors (and never should be in my opinion) but it is an essential and expected element of good councillorship. All councillors should avail themselves of training and I would encourage everyone to commit to at least the Foundation level of our Councillor Development Framework (CDF), which you can find details of at <https://www.northantscalc.com/councillor-development-framework>. And where appropriate we work with the unitary councils to provide briefing sessions for parish and town councils, such as our recent Planning Briefing with West Northamptonshire Council (WNC) with over one hundred delegates present. Whatever your training and development needs, you will find something to suit you. See <https://www.northantscalc.com> for more information.

Please do continue to get in touch with your queries and questions... that's what we're here for!

CERTIFICATE IN LOCAL COUNCIL ADMINISTRATION

The Certificate in Local Council Administration (CiLCA) is a Level 3 accredited and recognised qualification for the local council sector, designed to test the basic levels of competence for the role of parish clerk.



CiLCA has been designed to cover all aspects of the clerk's role and learners are required to compile a portfolio of evidence to show they fully understand their job.

Northants CALC is the “Recognised Trainer” for CiLCA in Northamptonshire and the lead is Northants CALC’s Training Manager, Marie Reilly. Marie is also contracted to provide CiLCA training for the Leicestershire & Rutland Association of Local Councils (LRALC) and, for one year only, for the Lancashire Association of Local Councils (LALC).

Here, Marie provides an update on developments related to CiLCA...

The Society of Local Council Clerks (SLCC) has closed all CiLCA 2015 portfolios. This means if you attended CiLCA training before 2021 and wish to complete your CiLCA qualification you will need to do the CiLCA 2021 training programme and register again for the qualification.

If this is you, then don't panic! Whilst there have been some changes made to the CiLCA learning outcomes, the majority remains very much the same. So rather than put you through seven three-hour training sessions spread across eight months we are running a CiLCA Intensive training day where we cover all the learning outcomes and the changes in a whole day of training to enable you to complete your portfolio. You may even be able to use some of the work you've completed by making a few tweaks. The cost of this would be £400+VAT for:

- A 1000 - 1600 training session which will include lunch and refreshments.
- Post training support from myself as the CiLCA recognised trainer for Northamptonshire.
- Access to CiLCA Focus Sessions.
- A 1:1 review of your portfolio once you've completed all the learning outcomes before you submit your work.

There is an additional fee of £450 (no VAT) payable to the SLCC for the qualification registration.

At this time, we are asking clerks to give an indication as to whether they'd be interested in attending a CiLCA Intensive training day or not. Please use this link to complete a short form by 31 December 2023 to express an interest:

<https://forms.office.com/e/E1e6fFYCag>.

This CiLCA Intensive training day is aimed at clerks who have previously attended CiLCA training. Anyone who hasn't been on CiLCA training before will need to attend the full training programme. Our next CiLCA training programme starts in March 2024. To express an interest in joining the 2024 CiLCA cohort, please complete this short form <https://forms.office.com/e/sCL4yhYBkn>. Places will be confirmed in January 2024. More information about CiLCA can be found here <https://www.northantscalc.com/cilca/about-cilca>.

COMMUNITY OWNERSHIP FUND

The Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) has confirmed that the next application window for the Community Ownership Fund (round three window three) will open on 6 December and will close on 31 January 2024.

The government is providing funding over four years to support community groups to take ownership of assets and amenities at risk of being lost, such as community centres, parks, pubs, and post office buildings. Applicants can register for support webinars via the My Community website on:

- How to create a strong Community Ownership Fund application
- How to raise match funding for your Community Ownership Fund project

Webinar and slides: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/community-ownership-fund-round-3-webinar-slides-and-recording>

Prospectus: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/community-ownership-fund-prospectus/community-ownership-fund-prospectus--3>



Is there a community building your council could rescue?

MPs & STAR COUNCILS

The National Association of Local Councils (NALC) held a Parliamentary Reception on 29 November 2023 hosted by NALC's president, Baroness Scott of Needham Market. The NALC Star Council Awards winners were announced at the dazzling ceremony held in the House of Lords. The prestigious and packed-out event brought together councillors, clerks, MPs, Peers, academics, stakeholders, journalists, and other leading opinion formers to celebrate the sector and recognise those individuals and organisations that have demonstrated exceptional dedication in supporting their communities.

There were two nominees from Northamptonshire up for awards. Cllr Freya Davies from Flore Parish Council was nominated in the Young Councillor of the Year category, and Mark Pengelly from Corby Town Council was nominated in the Councillor of the Year category. Sadly, neither were chosen as the category winners, but it is a significant accolade to be nominated, given that there are around 100,000 parish and town councillors in England!

County Associations had been encouraged to invite their county MPs to join the event, which showcased the best of parish and town councils. Invitations were extended to Northamptonshire's seven MPs, and we were delighted that three of them, Philip Hollobone, Tom Pursglove, and Andrew Lewer were able to be there. Andrea Leadsom responded but unfortunately had other commitments following her ministerial appointment. Recognising that time might be short on the day, Northants CALC prepared a briefing note highlighting some key issues that we wished to draw to MPs' attention:

Remote Meetings

Northants CALC was disappointed that the government rejected the Lord's amendment to the Levelling Up & Regeneration Bill that would have provided for council meetings to be held by remote means. It was a missed opportunity. The government's argument that "*councillors need to be physically*



Mike Scott (right), Northants CALC's National Assembly Representative and Andrew Lewer MP talked about warehouse developments, shortages of planning staff, and devolution.

present to engage with citizens in a way that builds meaningful relationships” is not rational and flies in the face of the evidence presented by the LGA, ADSO, NALC, LLG, the SLCC and many other sector bodies. Northants CALC agrees with the government’s strong view *“that one of the core principles of local democracy is that citizens can attend council meetings to interact in person with their local representatives”* and thinks that should always be the case. However, parish councils are only required to meet four times per year (Local Government Act 1972, Sch 12, Part II, para 8(1)) whereas most meet monthly, or perhaps ten times per year. It would be simplicity itself for legislation to require that the four meetings required by the ‘72 Act are held in person and then any meetings in addition to the statutory requirement can be held wherever the council wishes, including by remote means. Northants CALC would be interested to know if the county MPs support that line, which would give councils the choice of where to meet for most of their meetings.

Development Pressure

Northamptonshire is experiencing increasing development pressure, with a number of large-scale warehouse and rail projects in the pipeline. These projects are expected to bring significant economic benefits to the county, but they also raise concerns about the impact on the environment and local communities. Member parish and town councils frequently tell us about the support they have had from their MP, and the “listening ear” has been much appreciated. However, since the creation of the unitary councils in 2021 there has been a reduction in the capacity and capability of the local planning function, and whilst this may be gradually improving, significant concerns remain. There is a lack of strategic vision for Northamptonshire’s built environment, and the pre-2021 Local Plans have yet to be reviewed and refreshed. Northamptonshire is strategically important and yet there is a disconnect between national policy (e.g., NPPF), Local Plans, and the views and concerns of residents. We would challenge the county’s MPs to promote and be part of a far more joined-up and co-ordinated approach, and to be part of creating the overall vision for how the county develops over the next 50 years. For example, a countywide “Development Summit” in 2024, hosted by the county’s MPs in partnership with the Local Planning Authorities, could be a way of providing and demonstrating, local leadership and vision. Accepting that development is necessary, we would like to see far more from the government in terms of investment to mitigate the impact of development. We would like biodiversity net gain (BNG) to be hard baked into all development proposals, and for it to be rigorously monitored and enforced, with

input from local communities. Where development has impacted roads, the environment, or local communities, we would expect to see local and national government working together to ensure that reinstatements and replacements are provided to at least the standard that existed prior to the development, and ideally much higher.

Devolution

As the unitary councils focus more and more on their statutory obligations, there will be increasing pressure on discretionary, local services. Northants CALC's research on other unitary areas in England shows that there is a transition of assets, services, and cost, from the principal council(s) to parish and town councils following Local Government Reorganisation. It is vital that this is well planned and well managed, and that sufficient time and support is provided for parish and town councils to increase their capacity to do more. Northants CALC has challenged the unitary councils to set up Devolution Task Forces to start the preparation work and would greatly appreciate any support that the county's MPs are able to offer. It is an opportunity to ensure that vital community and local services are protected, before the reality of local government finances means they are lost for good. We've seen what happened with the county's libraries: Where the local community was able to take over control and management, the service has been protected and is flourishing (Community Managed Libraries now outperform the principal-council retained libraries). Had Northamptonshire County Council planned and managed the "devolution" of libraries better, more community libraries, and the vital services delivered from them, could have been saved.

Conclusion

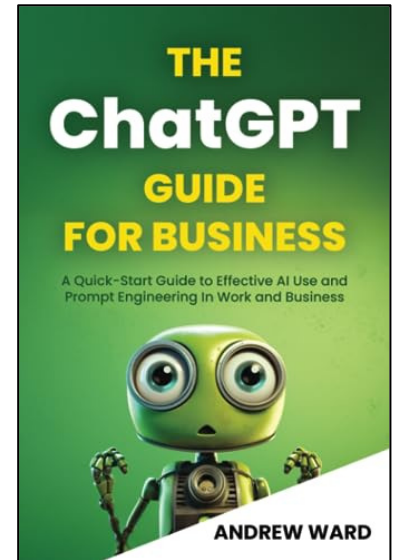
Whilst completely understanding and appreciating the relative roles and responsibilities of local and national government, Northants CALC feels that there are several areas as described above that require better vision and leadership and we would urge the county's MPs to do all they can in that regard.

A copy of the briefing note has been sent to all the county's MPs.

You can read all about the Star Council Awards and see details of all the nominees and winners at <https://www.nalc.gov.uk/news/entry/2732-nalc-celebrates-excellence-as-it-crowns-its-star-council-awards-winners>. Northants CALC sends congratulations to all the nominees and winners.

ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE

The Northants CALC AI Task Group, which was set up in July 2023, held its second meeting on 15 November 2023. We were joined by a special guest speaker, Andrew Ward, Managing Director of software house Scorchsoft and author of *The ChatGPT Guide for Business: A Quick-Start Guide to Effective AI Use and Prompt Engineering In Work and Business* ([see Amazon](#)). Andrew described the “state of the art” in terms of AI as a business tool and it certainly got the working group thinking. It is fair to say that some of it was a bit over our heads, but Andrew gave us some very useful analogies that helped the task group understand the broad principles.



The Task Group will meet monthly, with the next meeting being on 20 December 2023, where we might consider the impact of AI on Christmas!

It is increasingly obvious that AI will impact almost every aspect of council life, and that there will be positive impacts and negative impacts.

One negative impact we have seen relates to Intellectual Property (IP) rights. Parish and town councils (and community groups) may sometimes produce newsletters and web publications using – ahem – “library photos” and printed texts from sources such as Google. Because the resources are used for a council or not-for-profit local purpose, the copyright of such material is often not considered. Now, a new breed of IP rights lawyers are trawling the Internet searching for unauthorised use of copyrighted material and they are using AI to do it. Whereas before such people may have just used text-based web searches to track down their client’s materials, now AI can do that much more quickly and can even identify copyrighted images used in publications that are put on the web. Northants CALC assisted a parish council to defend a copyright claim just over ten years ago but has received another three copyright-related enquiries in the past two months. The financial risk may be relatively low still, and anyone wishing to assert a copyright claim would have to demonstrate the financial harm done to the copyright holder, which is harder if the material has not been used for profit, but the hassle and stress of dealing with such a claim could be significant. The

message is clear, do not use images or text from the Internet unless you are sure they are free to use, or you have paid for a licence.

Getting back to the potential positive impacts of AI, Microsoft has now released its AI productivity tool, “Copilot”. It is available for Enterprise customers only at the moment (£25/month) but will be rolled out to all 365 users in due course. The Microsoft web site says *“Copilot is integrated into Microsoft 365 in two ways. It works alongside you, embedded in the Microsoft 365 apps you use every day — Word, Excel, PowerPoint, Outlook, Teams and more — to unleash creativity, unlock productivity and uplevel skills. Today we’re also announcing an entirely new experience: Business Chat. Business Chat works across the LLM, the Microsoft 365 apps, and your data — your calendar, emails, chats, documents, meetings, and contacts — to do things you’ve never been able to do before. You can give it natural language prompts like “Tell my team how we updated the product strategy,” and it will generate a status update based on the morning’s meetings, emails and chat threads.”*

See more at <https://blogs.microsoft.com/blog/2023/03/16/introducing-microsoft-365-copilot-your-copilot-for-work/>.

In 2024 there will be an explosion in sector-specific applications that have AI at their centre. They are likely to be developed with principal councils in mind to start with but will inevitably be rolled out to parish and town councils in time. An example is FOIWorks from SocietyWorks, which describes itself as *“a trusted provider of digital products and consultancy for local government and the public sector.”* (<https://www.societyworks.org>). FOIWorks *“Streamlines authorities’ FOI workflows by suggesting public records from previous case responses and reducing the amount of correspondence.”* It helps *“reduce time wasted on Section 21 “information already available” responses”* and *“resurfaces past responses, helping to get more value out of past work.”* Learning as it goes, *“The system becomes more effective as more responses are added to the disclosure log.”* With an annual fee of £10k+, it’s not something that parish or town councils would likely use, but it might help with getting information from principal councils!

If you or your council are using AI please get in touch (info@northantscalc.com) and share your experience, good or bad. And let us know if you can see practical benefits, or potential risks that relate specifically to parish and town councils and we will feed them into the AI Task Group discussions.

YES MINISTER

The November/December edition of *eUpdate* in 2022 carried an article titled “*Meet the New Local Government Minister*” introducing, Lee Rowley MP. At the time he said, “*you will always have somebody who is very keen to find out more, very keen to listen and very keen to work with you.*” It would have been wonderful to have an article in this edition reporting on all the things Lee Rowley had listened to the sector about and all the things we had worked together on. Sadly, “always” ended on 13 November 2023 when Mr Rowley was reshuffled to be housing minister. So, meet the new, new local government minister...

Simon Hoare MP assumed office as Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Local Government at the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) on 13 November 2023. Mr Hoare has been a parish councillor, a member of West Oxfordshire District Council and Oxfordshire County Council and is currently MP for North Dorset.



Simon Hoare MP.

Attending the National Association of Local Councils (NALC) Star Council Awards (see report above), Mr Hoare thanked parish councils, councillors, and clerks, stating they are “*unsung very often unseen*” but “*towns and villages are demonstrably and immeasurably improved by what you do day in and day out*”. Commenting on the awards, he said, “*the awards shine a spotlight on the excellent work you have done and everybody who is involved in the work of a parish or town council is a winner*”.

One of Simon Hoare’s first tasks was to sit before the Levelling Up, Housing and Communities Committee inquiry into financial distress at local authorities (<https://committees.parliament.uk/work/7943/financial-distress-in-local-authorities>) where he said that “*the words ‘broken’ and ‘beyond repair’ are words often bandied around whereas, in fact, certain things are capable of being reshaped and reformed to make them fit for purpose.*”

You can find out more about Simon Hoare at <https://www.simonhoare.org.uk>.

76TH ANNUAL CONFERENCE

It seems like a while ago now, but the 76th Annual Conference & AGM was held on Saturday 7 October 2023 at Moulton Community Centre. 130 delegates, speakers, exhibitors, and guests attended.



The AGM business, including the election of officers, and setting the subscription fee for 2024/25 was transacted smoothly and efficiently. The board of directors was appointed en bloc with one change following the resignation of Ally Chang (Finedon Town Council) and the appointment of Kate Houlihan (Far Cotton & Delapre Community Council).

Following the formal business, Northants CALC CEO, Danny Moody, gave a presentation on AI and Parish & Town Councils, starting with an overview of AI and then exploring the impact of AI – both positive and negative – in the parish and town council sector. Danny gave several examples of how AI could be used for things such as community engagement, reporting defects on the rights of way network, and helping to make comments on planning applications. A short Q&A followed the presentation, where the dichotomy of the pros and cons of AI was explored.

A break for refreshments provided another opportunity for delegates to speak to the exhibitors. We are very fortunate to have the support of several companies that specialise in the parish council market, including Wicksteed Playgrounds, Cloudy IT, CCLA, Clear Utility Solutions, Blachere Illuminations, Parish Online, Breakthrough Communications, Rialtas, and SLCC Northamptonshire. Northants CALC is very grateful to all our exhibitors and commercial sponsors for their generous support and for giving up their Saturday to be with us.

After the break there was a session called “*Engagement with the Unitary Councils*” with guest speakers George Candler, Interim Chief Executive at North Northamptonshire Council, and Sally Burns, Director of Public Health at West Northamptonshire Council.

George Candler walked delegates through NNC's strategic plan and the vision that drives what the council does. He said that a permanent CEO is being recruited and an appointment is expected by the end of November, with an announcement on 7 December 2023 at NNC's full council meeting. George said that the financial outlook and the operational environment for all councils is challenging and that NNC has an £8million predicted shortfall for 2023/24, with adults' and children's services being the most challenging and representing approx. 57% of overall expenditure. George said that he had been passionately involved with parish and town councils and had helped create Shrewsbury Town Council in Shropshire and Northampton Town Council. He said, "*I and NNC recognise the importance of parish and town councils and it is important that the relationship is maintained and developed.*"

Sally Burns opened by saying that she was standing in for WNC's Chief Executive, Anna Earnshaw, who sent her best wishes to the conference and apologies that she couldn't attend in person due to another long-standing commitment. Sally said that she was pleased to be at the conference because as Director of Public Health and a parish councillor herself, she knows the vital role that parish and town councils play in health and wellbeing in their communities. Sally outlined the transformation journey that WNC has been on since its creation on 1 April 2021 and agreed with George Candler that councils are operating under significant financial and service pressures. Sally said that good and positive progress was being made, albeit that there is always more to do. She introduced Alan Burns, the Parish Liaison Officer for WNC, and set out how his role was created and developed following the recommendations in Northants CALC's Building Communities prospectus.

The final section of the conference was the recognition awards and Danny Moody started by announcing that the 2023 Council of the Year was Rothwell Town Council. Cllr Ian Jelley and Clerk, Jo Garner received the Council of the Year trophy from the Association's President, Jeffery Greenwell (see photo right).

The conference then recognised the thirteen clerks that had achieved the Certificate in Local Council Administration (CiLCA) qualification



during the year, Roade Parish Council for being accredited at Foundation Stage in the Local Council Award Scheme (LCAS), and to all the councillors that had completed one or more stages of the Councillor Development Framework (CDF).

In closing, chair Mike Scott, said *“Thank you everyone. It’s been a fabulous morning and I hope that you enjoyed it and that you got something out of it.”* Mike thanked all the sponsors and exhibitors, the guest speakers, the team at Moulton Parish Council for hosting, and the staff team at Northants CALC for putting the whole event together.

The 77th Northants CALC Annual Conference & AGM will be held on Saturday 5 October 2024, again at Moulton Community Centre, so put the date in your diary now!

The above report is an extract from <https://tinyurl.com/26xn4sy2> where you can read the full report and download copies of all the speaker’s presentations as well as the minutes of the formal business and see a gallery of photos from the day kindly taken by Cllr Geoff Fellows.

LOCAL COUNCILS AND CHURCH GRANTS

For decades there has been disagreement on whether parish and town councils have a legal power to provide grant funding to churches. The lawyers at the National Association of Local Councils (NALC) said no. The Society of Local Council Clerks (SLCC) said yes. The Church of England, unsurprisingly, agreed with the SLCC.



The Levelling Up and Regeneration Act 2023, which received Royal Assent on 26 October 2023, seeks to clarify the matter once and for all, in favour of parish councils being able to fund churches if they wish (it’s a power, not a duty). Section 82 of the Act will come into effect on 26 December 2023 and should address the long-standing problem. NALC has been liaising with SLCC to seek a consistent sector approach and new legal guidance should be available in the coming weeks. When it is published Northants CALC will disseminate it to all member councils.

COMMUNITY PAYBACK

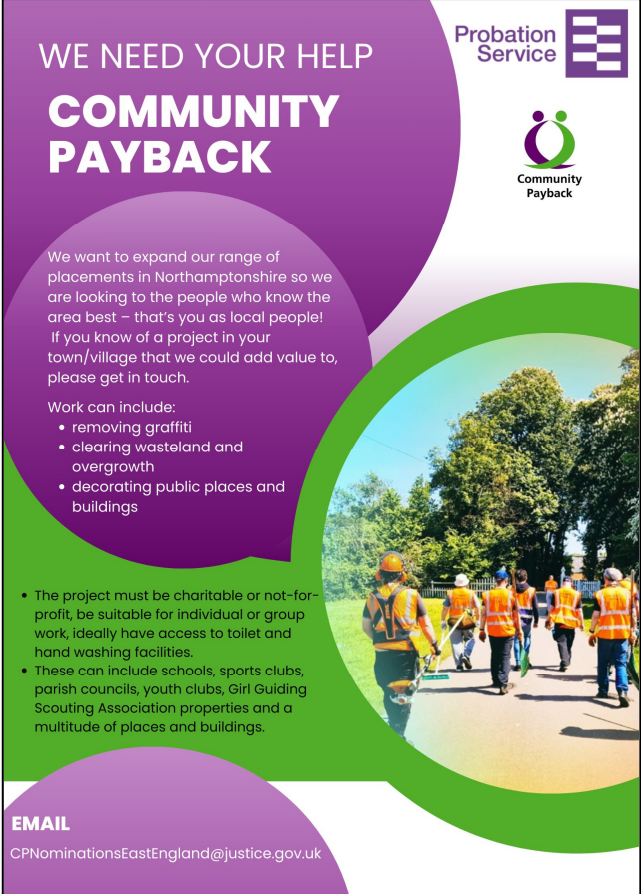
A person convicted of a crime by a court may get a community sentence instead of being sent to prison. Community sentences can be given for crimes such as damaging property, theft, and assault. A community sentence means that a person must do unpaid work in their local community, like removing graffiti. This is called Community Payback. A court will issue a community sentence if it thinks a person is more likely to stop committing crime than if they go to prison, or if it is the first time the person has committed a crime, or if a person has a mental health condition that affects their behaviour.

The Northamptonshire Community Payback Team, which is part of the Probation Service, works with people that have been given a Community Order by the courts. The Community Payback Team is looking for new individual placements for people that are low risk to the community.

Unpaid work involves people on community sentences working for free on projects, as determined by probation. The courts can set the number of hours that need to be worked (between 40 to 300 hours) and all the hours should be completed within 12 months.

All offenders must meet certain criteria before they are assigned to specific tasks. In general, community payback is given to low and medium risk offenders. It is not suitable for high-risk offenders. The Community Payback Team would like to work with parish and town councils and would like to speak to any councils that would be willing to offer work for individuals.

The CP Placement Co-Ordinator for Northamptonshire is Diane Line who can be contacted on 01933 837919 or at Diane.Line1@justice.gov.uk.



The poster features a purple and green color scheme. At the top left, it says 'WE NEED YOUR HELP' in white, followed by 'COMMUNITY PAYBACK' in large white letters. The Probation Service logo is in the top right, and the Community Payback logo is below it. A central text block explains the goal of expanding placements and asks for local help. Below this, a list of work tasks is provided. A circular inset photo shows several people in orange safety vests working on a path. At the bottom, an email address is listed.

WE NEED YOUR HELP

COMMUNITY PAYBACK

Probation Service

Community Payback

We want to expand our range of placements in Northamptonshire so we are looking to the people who know the area best – that's you as local people! If you know of a project in your town/village that we could add value to, please get in touch.

Work can include:

- removing graffiti
- clearing wasteland and overgrowth
- decorating public places and buildings

- The project must be charitable or not-for-profit, be suitable for individual or group work, ideally have access to toilet and hand washing facilities.
- These can include schools, sports clubs, parish councils, youth clubs, Girl Guiding Scouting Association properties and a multitude of places and buildings.

EMAIL

CPNominationsEastEngland@justice.gov.uk

DOES YOUR COUNCIL SUFFER FROM 'SOCIAL LOAFING'?

An article adapted and reproduced with the kind permission of Graeme Nahkies, Boardworks International.

A common expectation we have of a council (or of any group) is that its capabilities and achievements will be greater than the sum of its parts. On many councils, however, most of the 'heavy lifting' is done by a relatively small subset of the group while others contribute comparatively little. Consequently, the group is less effective than would be expected from the capabilities of its individual members.

There could be many reasons why some councillors contribute less than their colleagues. They may be unclear about their roles and what is expected of them; they may lack confidence and/or competence; their motivation may differ from that of their colleagues; they may not feel valued; the council's process for engaging its members may be flawed. This list could go on, but the explanation might lie in a common phenomenon psychologists refer to as 'social loafing'.

What is social loafing?

Social loafing is the tendency for individuals to put less effort into a task when they are working as part of a group than when they are working alone.

As an experienced observer once suggested, councils are often little more than incompetent groups of competent people. A council might be less effective than it could be because its work is disorganised. While true in some circumstances, social loafing is distinct from a council's underachievement due to poor co-ordination or an inadequate conceptualisation of its work. Social loafing is about reduced effort on the part of individuals in a group.

The phenomenon of social loafing was first noticed by German researcher Max Ringelmann. He found that a group of workers pulled harder on a rope when they did it individually than when they were pulling as part of a team. Subsequently, it has become apparent that social loafing occurs not only



in relation to physical tasks but also when, as in the council, groups of people are involved in creative, evaluative, and cognitive tasks. This phenomenon has been observed across a range of demographic and cultural characteristics although there are some interesting variations. For example, in one analysis researchers found 'free riding' in groups was more common among men than women and in Western than in Eastern countries. This pattern occurs because women and people in Eastern cultures tend to value the performance and well-being of the collective more than do men and people in most western cultures. Others have commented that unskilled group members are more likely to loaf than skilled ones.

Social loafing is especially problematic when it occurs in council meetings because councils make decisions and are accountable for those decisions collectively. When one or more councillors are not contributing to the full extent of their capability potentially valuable individual contributions are lost. This has implications for the dynamic of the council as well as for the quality of its collective performance.

When and why does social loafing occur?

Social loafing does not result because individuals are flawed, lazy, and looking for a free ride. People are most likely to become less motivated and loaf when:

- They believe their individual effort (good or bad) will not be so visible and, therefore, is less likely to be evaluated and acknowledged by others in the group.
- They believe their attendance and/or effort will not necessarily have consequences for the performance of the group (i.e., the group's work will be accomplished irrespective of their personal effort - which they may think has little value).
- The work of the group or the task they are personally assigned holds little interest or meaning for them. When people care about the work, they are more likely to make an effort. They may also lift their game if their contribution is likely to win approval and acceptance from the group or if they are committed to the collective success of the group.

Missed meetings and poor meeting preparation, superficial, sporadic, or non-existent contributions to council dialogue, inattention or even obvious disinterest, and late arrival and early departure may all be indications that loafing is present.

Certain conditions may even encourage it. For example, the larger the size of a council the more likely it is that social loafing will occur. The size factor is likely to be compounded if members are representatives and/or subject matter experts. Both are prone to define their contribution to the council in relatively narrow terms and engage only when the interests of their constituency or their speciality make it onto the agenda.

Protecting against social loafing in councils

The characteristics and incidence of social loafing can vary widely but there is a wide range of initiatives worth considering to keep this problem at bay.

- Individual councillors should have reason to believe that their contributions will be both valued and observed. This calls for the careful induction of council members to ensure that their experience and capabilities are acknowledged and that they understand what is expected of them.
- The size of the council should be reviewed occasionally. Social loafing is far more likely to occur once council size increases beyond single figures. The smaller the council, the more compelled each member is likely to feel to contribute.
- Active management of council meeting structure and content to ensure this is worthy of council members' time and attention. Too many councils are passive recipients of clerk's reports and presentations which have little relevance to the true responsibilities of councillors and the real issues facing their councils.
- Active management of council meeting process to ensure that all members are both expected to, and are enabled to, contribute actively to the council's dialogue. This requires skilled facilitation by the council chairman.
- Active engagement between formal council meetings. This can be achieved in a number of ways. For example, assigning members to working groups to work

through specific issues or proposals ahead of collective consideration by the whole council.

- When chairs and clerks seek out the views of individual council members between meetings this is another way of turning the spotlight on individuals and making them feel valued.
- Council and councillor performance evaluation. For evaluation to be a useful and valid process, council and councillor roles and responsibilities need to be clear and expectations of individual performance stated up front. Individuals then get regular structured peer feedback on their contribution to the council. Council charters and letters of expectation provided to councillors upon appointment are related and useful tools.
- Build strong relationships. Because councils meet infrequently generating effective teamwork is difficult. Council membership that is subject to regular turnover can compound this problem. Establishing personal connections, however, encourages council team-mates to become more committed and dedicated. People generally feel guilty about leaving their friends and respected colleagues to carry the load.

Take some time to consider whether your council contains any “loafers” and then think about how they might be turned into active, positive contributors.

CHIEF EXEC DESIGNATE

North Northamptonshire Council (NNC) has announced the selection of Adele Wylie as its new Chief Executive. The appointment is subject to approval at Council on 7/12/23.

Adele started at North Northamptonshire in November 2020 as Executive Director Customer & Governance and Monitoring Officer, in which capacity she has worked closely with Northants CALC over the past three years.



You can read more about the appointment in the papers for the council meeting under Item 8 at <https://tinyurl.com/5n8ccxhd>, and you can follow Adele on LinkedIn at <https://www.linkedin.com/in/adele-wylie-707230123>.

TAKE ME TO YOUR LEADER

The latest round of meetings with the unitary council Leaders was completed in recent weeks. Northants CALC CEO, Danny Moody, met with Cllr Jason Smithers, Leader of North Northamptonshire Council (NNC) on 31 October 2023, and with Cllr Jonathan Nunn, Leader of West Northamptonshire Council (WNC) on 3 November 2023.



*Cllr Jason Smithers (left) and
Cllr Jonathan Nunn.*

The meeting with Jason Smithers was held at the Corby Cube with Cllr David Howes, Executive Member for Localism, and Adele Wylie, Monitoring Officer also in attendance. The meeting focused on the standard of communications between NNC and parish and town councils and on the future of devolution. Jason Smithers reiterated his basic position that NNC is open to dialogue with any parish or town council in North Northamptonshire about the devolution of an individual asset or service, but that no budget would be transferred with it. Clearly parish and town councils will not be interested in taking on assets and services unless finance follows function. Jason Smithers is open to further dialogue on devolution and David Howes asked for additional detail on the sort of things that parish and town councils may wish to take on. Jason Smithers confirmed that NNC has no current plans for wholesale devolution across North Northamptonshire. On the standard of communications, Jason Smithers acknowledged that NNC officers and/or councillors not responding to emails from parish and town councils was not acceptable and offered to take up the councillor issue at a future group meeting. Other topic areas covered included the Local Area Partnerships (LAPs), the Northants CALC Health & Wellbeing Proposal, and NNC's Big 50 project.

The meeting with Jonathan Nunn was held at One Angel Square in Northampton. This meeting also focused on the standard of communications between WNC and parish and town councils and on the future of devolution with a detailed and lively conversation. Jonathan Nunn listened carefully and completely understood that "devolution" is in fact a very detailed, pan-council concept, and that for it to be managed successfully there would need to be appropriate resources applied and that it would take considerable time. He noted that whilst WNC has no current plans for wholesale devolution across West Northamptonshire, the sooner a

project is started to build a framework for devolution the better. Other topic areas covered included the Northants CALC Health & Wellbeing Proposal, WNC's S106 and CIL position, and a particular situation in Overstone and the North Northampton Sustainable Urban Extension (SUE).

Northants CALC has challenged both unitary councils to each create a "Devolution Task Group", comprising of, for example, the relevant director or assistant director, representatives from legal, assets, planning, and highways, the relevant parish liaison officer, and a representative from Northants CALC. The task groups could meet monthly to build a framework for devolution, identifying what is needed from the unitary council and what is needed from the parish and town councils. The objective is to prevent vital community assets and services being lost because the unitary council retains them dogmatically until they can no longer be afforded. The meetings with the Leaders sowed the seed for such an approach and we hope to progress to the next stage in early 2024.

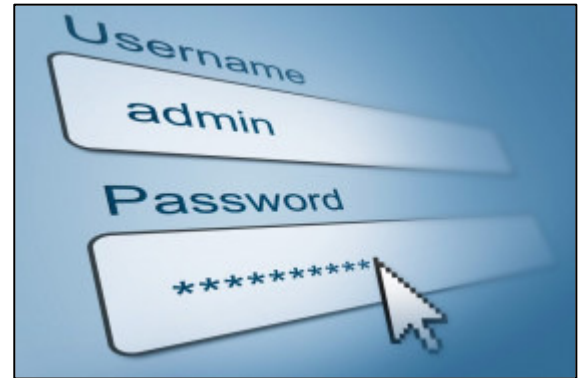
ROYAL IMAGES

Many parish and town councils proudly displayed a portrait of the late Queen Elizabeth and Prince Philip in their civic buildings and will wish to do the same for King Charles and Queen Camilla. In the spring, the government announced a scheme to provide all local authorities with one free portrait, but the scheme appears to have been significantly delayed. The National Association of Civic Officers (NACO) has recently published a useful update, which you can read at <https://www.naco.uk.com/news/royal-portrait-new-information>. It says that "*The scheme is being delivered in stages, to help manage the supply of portraits. Principal local authorities can apply when the scheme opens. Town and Parish Councils will be able to apply for a free portrait at a later stage in the scheme and will be notified when they are able to access the portrait scheme website.*"

Meanwhile, Northants CALC has contacted Royal Images, the official supplier of royal portraits and other images. Mike O'Keefe at Royal Images said that a new official portrait has just been taken, which will be available through Royal Images (<https://www.royalimages.co.uk>) in the New Year in a variety of sizes and formats and will be sold as a mounted print for framing locally. Mike encourages parish and town councils to register their interest with him by email (mike@royalimages.co.uk) as soon as possible because of the demand that he expects (mainly from every British military establishment around the world!).

A CAUTIONARY TALE

Every parish and town council in England should have a web site and 99.9% do. But who owns the site, and who controls it? If you are a clerk or councillor, ask yourself this question “Do I know who has control of the master username and password for the council’s web site?” Typically, the person who builds and provides the site controls the master username and password. They might have shared those credentials with the clerk and/or chair of the council, but they always have the ability to change the details whenever they wish. When the website provider is a reputable company, such as Parish Online (<https://www.parish-online.co.uk/services/parish-council-website-package>) or 2Commune (<https://www.2commune.com>) then there will never be a problem (as long as the council keeps paying its bill!), but where the provider is a councillor, or worse a former councillor, there is always the potential for things to go wrong.



A parish council in Norfolk hit the headlines in September 2023 (<https://www.edp24.co.uk/news/23786872.row-spooner-row-website-leaves-parish-council-chaos/>) due to a row over control of the council’s web site and who had access to councillors’ emails. It led to the resignation of most of the councillors and plunged the council into disarray.

In the early days of councils having web sites (the early 2000s) it was quite common for a councillor – perhaps one who worked in the industry or who was an enthusiastic amateur – to set up and provide their council’s web site and email system. Often, they were run on a shoestring, and even hosted on the councillor’s own private hosting account. Such arrangements worked, and in some parishes, continue to work, but they rely very heavily on good will and positive relationships. Where that breaks down, the webmaster councillor has significant power, including the ability to covertly monitor emails and control what does, and doesn’t, go on the web site.

Purchasing from a reputable supplier comes at a cost, but it ensures that the council has a secure, robust, and sustainable website and email system. It also provides very considerable peace of mind!

SITUATIONS VACANT



All parish and town council officer vacancies in Northamptonshire are posted at <https://www.northantscalc.com/council-vacancies>.

If you or anyone you know might be looking for a clerkship and there isn't one on <https://www.northantscalc.com/council-vacancies> that fits the bill, please email

dmoody@northantscalc.com to receive details of potential future opportunities.

TRAINING AND DEVELOPMENT FOR LOCAL COUNCILS

We are running more courses than ever before. There is lots of training available to you as a clerk or councillor in Northamptonshire. See our dedicated web page <https://www.northantscalc.com/training-and-events> for details of all courses.

Northants CALC Training and Events



See our website for the latest courses available www.northantscalc.com/training-and-events

CHRISTMAS CLOSING

Although there would be no better way to spend Christmas than being in the office answering parish and town council queries, we are told that we must take a break! Regrettably therefore the office will close on Friday 22 December 2023 and reopen on Monday 2 January 2024.

Happy holidays! Wassail!!



NORTHANTS CALC CONTACTS

Danny Moody

Chief Executive

dmoody@northantscalc.com

X: [@ceo_ncalc](#)

Lesley Sambrook Smith

Deputy Chief Executive

lsambrooksmith@northantscalc.com

X: [@deputyceo_ncalc](#)

Marie Reilly

Training Manager

mreilly@northantscalc.com

Sophie Harding

Business Support Manager

sharding@northantscalc.com

General enquiries

info@northantscalc.com

Member Enquiry Service (MES)

mes@northantscalc.com

Data Protection Officer Service

dpo@northantscalc.com

Telephone

01327 831482

Address:

Northants CALC
PO Box 7936
Brackley
NN13 9BY

Web:

www.northantscalc.com

