

Update

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THE CHIEF'S BRIEF

By Danny Moody, Chief Executive, Northants CALC

A week is a long time in politics, so imagine what can happen in the two months between the publication of successive *eUpdates*! The March/April *eUpdate* was published a few days before the close of nominations in the local elections when the Conservatives had control of both unitary councils and the opening lines of the *eUpdate* were “*Local elections are a time of democratic renewal. A time for a fresh start and a clean slate.*” I did not realise at the time just how clean the slate was going to be wiped!

Two decades of Conservative control of upper-tier local government in Northamptonshire came to a shuddering halt on 1 May 2025, when Nigel Farage’s Reform UK took control of both unitary councils in the county as well as eight other principal councils around the country. It was a seismic shift and one that few people saw coming, including the traditional party’s campaign machines, which appear to have been caught on the hop.

And Reform didn’t just squeeze over the line; they obliterated the competition, taking 39 of the 68 seats on North Northamptonshire Council (NNC) and 42 of the 76 seats on West Northamptonshire Council (WNC). As electoral performances go, it was seriously impressive and caused a bigger turnover in councillors than has ever been seen before in the county. More than forty political big guns across Northamptonshire lost their seats, including the Leaders of the Conservative and Labour groups in West Northants. The Leader of the Conservatives in North Northants did not stand for re-election, which is looking like a very wise decision now. There is more about the political makeup of the unitary councils below.

Of the two hundred and twenty parish and town councils that had elections in May, just twenty-two (10%) managed a contested election; a woeful statistic for a sector that is part of democracy and local government. On the upside, there were no inquorate councils, which was a huge relief, and 83% of councils managed to

“As electoral performances go, it was seriously impressive and caused a bigger turnover in councillors than has ever been seen before in the county.”

fill at least two-thirds of their seats. There is a full roundup of the parish and town council elections below.

Since polling day, all councils have been busy having their annual council meetings, where the chair/mayor is elected, committees are formed, and any vacancies left after the elections are filled by co-option. Councils that struggled to generate candidates for the election seem to have no problem at all filling vacancies by co-option, which just seems bizarre. Some possible reasons are set out in the article on parish and town council elections below.

Promoting candidacy, the elections themselves, and then all the annual meetings has certainly given us plenty to do at Northants CALC. I'm looking forward to things getting a bit quieter and to getting back on top of my inbox! I have however managed to get out and about a bit for some timely reminders of the brilliant things that parish and town councils do. From a visit to the excellent community library now operated by Kingsthorpe Parish Council, to the Hackleton Annual Village Assembly, and many other parish visits in between, I am constantly in awe of the incredible effort that parish and town council clerks and councillors put in for their communities. Parish and town councils across Northamptonshire work tirelessly to make their villages and towns better places to live and they make such a vital contribution to a community's quality of life. The effort often goes unseen, unrewarded, and unappreciated, but without it, Northamptonshire would be half the place it is.

Parish and town councils are embarking on a new four-year term with renewed energy and enthusiasm. Our job at Northants CALC is to support member councils with whatever they need to help them deliver brilliant things for their communities. That includes being the bridge between parish and town councils and the unitary councils and never was there a more important time for that function. We will develop new relationships with the Leaders, Cabinets, and Executives and ensure that everything the unitary councils do is "parish proofed". I have met already with Cllr Mark Arnull, Leader of West Northamptonshire Council (WNC) and we will soon be meeting with Cllr Martin Griffiths, Leader of North Northamptonshire Council (NNC). We will advocate for parish and town councils, and we will keep our member councils abreast of all developments.

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

A DAY AT THE PALACE

Every year, Northants CALC has the pleasure of nominating one councillor and their guest to go to the Royal Garden Party at Buckingham Palace. The award recognises long and meritorious service, and this year the honour went to Cllr John Mitchell from Wollaston Parish Council. Here, John describes his wonderful day out...

"It was an honour and privilege to have been nominated and invited to attend the recent Buckingham Palace Garden Party representing Northamptonshire Town and Parish Councils.

My wife and I arrived at 2.15pm at the top of Constitution Hill to join the queue waiting to enter the Palace at Hyde Park Gate. The queue was about 100 meters long at that stage and lengthened to almost 300 m by the time the gates opened just before the scheduled 3pm. Security was tight, requiring guests to show two items of identity. We meandered our way through the gardens, passing the lake, towards the main lawn. The lawn and gardens are so extensive that the 8,000 guests easily mingled, although seating within the garden and by the tea tents was limited so that it was standing room only for much of the afternoon. Tea was served soon after 3.30pm and we joined the crowd in the 200m long tea tent and were soon served with finger sandwiches, scones and cakes, all the delicacies of a Royal event. Having finished our tea we found that people had been gathering and were 5/6 deep around the cordoned off area awaiting the arrival of the Royal Family. The Yeoman of the Guard made their entry from the Palace followed by the King and Queen, Princess Anne, Duke and Duchess of Edinburgh and Duke and Duchess of Gloucester. The National Anthem was then played. The Royal Party moved through the cordoned off area speaking to selected guests introduced by the Gentlemen at Arms. The event was an example of precision organisation and amazing to be among the many guests socialising and enjoying the Palace gardens.

It was chilly in the late afternoon but the warmth of the occasion and being guests of King Charles in his "back yard", ensured a memorable day."



SETTLEMENT SPATIAL PLANS

Article provided by Louise Stubbs, Business Development & Projects Manager at ONH - www.oneillhomer.co.uk



In an uncertain planning environment could a Settlement Spatial Plan help your Council Plan for Change?

The unitary planning authorities are battling to devise their first Local Plans covering a much larger and more diverse area than the old districts. They must do that to a tight timetable and must not to skimp on effective community engagement. While doing that work, they must also devote their stretched resources to participating with other authorities in producing a new sub-regional planning strategy at the same time. Oh, and developers no longer want to wait for all that to be finished and a plan to be produced before submitting major planning applications.

Sound familiar, Northants?

Across England, town and parish councils are stepping up to these challenges to fill the gaps in Local Plans and shape the future of their communities. But to have a chance of winning they need to understand how their settlements actually work and build and articulate a compelling planning strategy. They must do so quickly, effectively and without costing the earth.

With this in mind, ONH has drawn on its decade-long experiences in planning, and local council expertise, to develop a new **Settlement Spatial Plan** product designed to give local councils a practical, credible, and community-backed framework for shaping development.

It provides a clear, locally focussed blueprint for how a town or village should grow sustainably to inform decisions on:

- Finding the best locations for new housing and employment that are sustainable, inclusive and place-sensitive

- Upgrading or creating new travel, social and green infrastructure
- Maintaining and improving the essential character of the area's built and natural assets

The Plan can be used to shape discussions with developers, guide responses to planning applications, feed into emerging Local Plans and Spatial Development Strategies, or be a first step towards undertaking a new or reviewed Neighbourhood Plan.

Having a Plan means a community does not need to wait for the local planning authority to figure out what an indicative housing figure might be. It can actually drive that number so that its community doesn't get caught between two stools and can consider what the community feels it needs to be added to its existing infrastructure in a way that Local Plans often can't. This also means alternative scenarios can be presented to any impatient developers that won't wait for the long-off Local Plan to allocate land and come to their own view on what a community infrastructure needs to be included on their site.

It is the antithesis of the conventional "let's find the fewest number of the least worst housing sites" approach that has dominated plan-making for the last two decades, leaving too many towns and villages facing travel chaos and missing vital infrastructure.

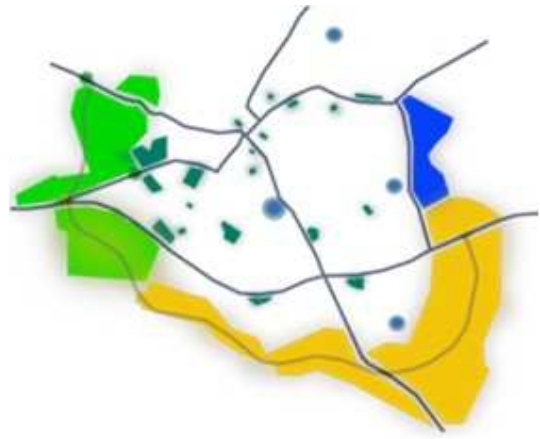
So, how does it work?

We have designed the product to enable highly effective digital and offline engagement and to be informed by only the essential data and insights. It makes what seems complex on the face of it into something simple to build, communicate, test and advocate. It takes weeks not months. and is priced so that any town or parish council will be able to afford it and manage it as a project.

The story of Buckingham Town Council's recent experience is told below. It shows that communities that plan smart, early, and together will be the ones that can lead change.

The town was facing, and continues to face, numerous speculative development proposals.

It adopted a growth-scenario approach in thinking about the town's future to ensure a richer understanding of when and where step changes in supporting infrastructure need to be planned for as an integral issue, not an afterthought.



Three plausible, logical and distinct growth scenarios for the town were tested through community and stakeholder engagement and against environmental assessments and infrastructure capacity and distribution.

The Town Council chose the scenario best placed to match growth to infrastructure improvements over the next decade that does not prejudice longer term growth options. It has used this as the basis for its modified Neighbourhood Plan proposals and will use it to inform its comments on the forthcoming Local Plan. In the meantime, it is using it to comment on major planning applications and to engage with the right land interests to deliver its vision.

If your council wants to consider and plan for housing growth, providing employment land, setting aside land for public open space, or all three and wants to discuss the issues and options, please contact Northants CALC. We can help you decide the best way forward and can put you in touch with the relevant experts and authorities.

NEW WASTE DUTIES – SIMPLER RECYCLING

New regulations that apply to all workplaces in England mean that, from 31 March 2025 for councils with more than 10 full-time employees, and from 31 March 2027 for all other councils, there is a legal duty to separate recycling and food waste from non-recyclable waste. Offices and premises used only or mainly for public meetings are included within premises to which the rules apply.

Northants CALC will forward further information to member councils in due course, but you can also read all about the Simpler Recycling initiative at <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/simpler-recycling-workplace-recycling-in-england>.

EMPLOYMENT LAW UPDATE

Article provided by our retained HR Advisor, Chris Moses,
of Personnel Advice & Solutions



Planned Tighter Controls on Changing Employment Contracts

The forthcoming Employment Rights Bill introduces a new law that makes it automatically unfair to dismiss an employee for refusing a change to their employment contract. This may come into force as early as this October.

Currently, councils can consult with their workforce to amend and change contracts of employment in response to changing circumstances or new challenges. To be able to do this the council needs a genuine business need, and to have conducted consultation with their workforce. If the council can demonstrate that there is a pressing need to change, and that a reasonable process of dialogue has been conducted with employees, changes can be introduced.

The new legislation outlaws this.

If a council wants to amend a contract clause and the employee says no, they can't be dismissed. For example, if demand for a community centre or village hall significantly drops, or increases, and the council wants to change the hours of the caretaker in response, it won't be able to force the new working hours on its staff.

Even if new employment legislation demands that employment contracts need to be updated, and an employee refuses to accept the change, dismissal isn't an option, and the employee remains on the old contract.

How do you stop the Public Harassing your Employees?

Recent legislation places responsibility for harassment of council employees by members of the public firmly on the shoulders of the council.

For councils whose workers are in regular contact with the public this is a serious concern. They have little control over how the public behave, and compensation for successful claims for harassment at an Employment Tribunal can be very high. However, those councils who take “reasonable steps” to protect their staff can defend themselves against such claims.

Tribunals have struck out claims against councils who can prove they have taken such steps. In *Leeds City Council & Hodder v Leader*, the council was able to demonstrate that:

- It had appropriate policies and procedures in place.
- Staff and their Union Representatives were consulted during the drafting of these procedures.
- Staff and managers were regularly trained in these procedures.
- Resources were made available to support Employees making allegations of harassment.
- All staff were aware of what unacceptable conduct was, and the consequences of acting in this manner.

Because of this the court partially dismissed the council from the claim.

To be able to use this defence councils need to:

1. Have up to date policies and procedures that;
 - 1.1. Explain what harassment is.
 - 1.2. Set out how the council will respond to complaints of harassment.
 - 1.3. State who to report allegations to.
 - 1.4. Describe what action will be taken against those responsible.

2. Ensure that all staff are engaged and consulted in the production of these policies and procedures.
3. Ensure all staff receive training and updates on an annual basis regarding the implementation of these policies and procedures.
4. Ensure managers are regularly trained in responding to allegations of harassment and supporting Employees who make such complaints.
5. Have clear, simple and accessible Grievance and Disciplinary Procedures to respond to allegations.

Leeds City Council has resources that most parish and town councils don't have, such as Employee Assistance Programmes and professional counselling. However, that doesn't exclude smaller councils from using a reasonable steps defence. The key is to take steps that are appropriate to the size and resource capability of the organisation.

PROFILE

Chris Moses LL.M Chartered FCIPD is Managing Director of Personnel Advice & Solutions Ltd. He is a Chartered Fellow of the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development and has a master's degree in Employment Law. If you have any questions regarding these issues please feel free to contact him on (01529) 305056 or email p.d.solutions@zen.co.uk.

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Further fact sheets are available at: www.personneladviceandsolutions.co.uk.

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HIGHWAY ALERTS

If you want to know what works are being carried out on the roads near you, why not sign up for alerts on the Causeway one.network. Create a free account and then draw on the map an area around the roads you want updates on. You can control the frequency and type of alerts. You'll never be surprised by roadworks again! Go to <https://one.network/accounts/#sign-up> to create your account now.

PARISH & TOWN COUNCIL ELECTIONS

There are 220 parish, town, and community councils in Northamptonshire. All had elections on 1 May 2025.

Based on results in other counties that had local elections in 2024, there was a concern that there could be multiple inquorate parish councils in Northamptonshire following the elections, so Northants CALC ran a campaign in 2024/25 to help member councils to encourage candidacy.



The headline is that there were no inquorate councils following the elections, which is even an improvement on the performance in 2021, when there were two.

Whilst it was good that there were no inquorate councils, the overall electoral performance of all councils was dismal. Just 22 councils (10%) had a contested election, and in 9 of those there was a contest in some but not all wards.

Of the 13 unwarded parish councils that had a contested election, 4 had just one more candidate than seats, 5 had two more candidates than seats, and 4 had three or more candidates than seats. In the latter 4 councils there have been significant governance issues in the councils in 2024/25, which clearly helped motivate residents to stand for election.

Of the 9 warded parish and town councils, 5 generated only up to four more candidates than seats. The remaining four (Corby, Kettering, Northampton, and Wellingborough), which all run along party political lines, were strongly contested. The strongest contest was for Northampton Town Council (NTC), which had 59 candidates for 25 seats.

There were 198 councils that did not have a contested election, but of these, 37 managed to have the same number of candidates as seats available, 46 councils had just one vacancy, and a further 50 councils had two vacancies. The remainder, 65 councils, had between 3 and 8 vacancies.

An interesting measure is how many councils achieved the 66% elected members required to be eligible (subject to other conditions) to use the General Power of Competence (GPC). Of the 220 councils in total, 182 (83%) achieved at least 66% elected members.

As usual, councils are reporting no problem filling their vacancies by co-option after the elections. There are many reasons why this is the case, including:

- **Reduced Pressure:** Potential candidates might feel less pressure and public scrutiny when applying for a co-opted position compared to standing in an election.
- **Increased Awareness:** The election process often raises awareness about the council and its vacancies, prompting more people to consider joining after the elections.
- **Personal Invitations:** Current council members can personally invite and encourage individuals to join, making the process more approachable and less formal.
- **Immediate Needs:** The community might recognise the immediate need for representation and be more willing to step up when they see vacancies that need filling.
- **Simplified Process:** The co-option process is simpler and quicker than the full election process, making it more appealing to potential candidates.

There are lessons in those reasons that could help councils to promote candidacy for the 2029 elections. For example, if awareness of the council and its election can be raised and the election process can be made simpler, more candidates might come forward.

The election process, particularly the nomination procedure, came under scrutiny once again. The process of obtaining and completing a paper form and then hand delivering it to a remote location is out-dated and serves as a significant barrier to democracy. It is also costly in terms of time, money, and carbon. The Association of Electoral Administrators (AEA) published in February 2025 a New Blueprint for a Modern Electoral Landscape (<https://www.aea-elections.co.uk/wp->

<content/uploads/2025/03/AEA-Blueprint-2025.pdf>), which recommends that the government legislates to “*Make provision for all candidate nomination papers to be submitted online via a UK-wide and government funded portal integrated into local electoral management systems.*” and to “*Simplify the nominations process by removing the requirement for electors to sign each nomination.*” These recommendations would improve the nomination process greatly but whether the government has any appetite to implement them remains to be seen.

It is not possible to measure the effect that the Northants CALC campaign had on the number of nominations, but feedback received from member councils suggests that the advice, training, information, and resources the Association provided were widely used and very welcomed. The targeted mailings during the nomination period were particularly effective.

Northants CALC has arranged a debrief at the end of June with the electoral services managers at North Northamptonshire Council (NNC) and West Northamptonshire Council (WNC), so please do send us any comments, concerns, or observations and we will add them to the list.

JOIN THE COUNCILLOR PANEL: MAKE YOUR VOICE HEARD!

The Northants CALC Councillor Panel is an email-based consultation mechanism that has been running for several years now. It is designed to provide a platform for councillors to share their views and contribute to the development of policies and strategies that impact parish and town councils.



By joining the panel, you will have the chance to participate in polls and surveys that gather valuable data and evidence, helping Northants CALC respond to partner organisations such as the government, NALC, and North and West Northamptonshire Councils.

- **Influence Decision-Making** – Your input will help shape the direction of Northants CALC and ensure that the needs and views of parish councillors are heard.
- **Flexible Participation** – Membership is open to any member of a parish or town council or chairman of a parish meeting in membership of Northants CALC. You can join or resign from the panel at any time.
- **Low Time Commitment** – The panel operates electronically, with polls and surveys sent via email. Substantive polls/surveys (up to 2 per year) take no more than 20-30 minutes to respond to, while quick surveys (up to 6 per year) take just 5-10 minutes.
- **Confidentiality** – Your responses will be used to inform Northants CALC's strategy, policy, and direction, but individual panel members will never be identified when reporting results.

Joining the Councillor Panel is easy. Simply send a request by email to cllrpanel@northantscalc.gov.uk with your name, the name of your council, and the email address to be used for the Councillor Panel by 12 noon on Friday 20 June 2025. Don't miss this opportunity to make your voice heard and to contribute to the future of local councils in Northamptonshire. Join today and be part of a dynamic and influential group of councillors committed to making a positive impact in Northamptonshire.

RESEARCH ON CLERKS' MENTAL HEALTH & WELLBEING

Katherine Doughty, Clerk to Faringdon Town Council is conducting a survey for her research project on "*An Assessment of Mental Health & Wellbeing of Local Council Clerks in England*", which supports her BA Degree in Community Governance. It seeks to understand whether reports by some clerks on social media sites are representative of clerks' mental ill-health across the sector, which might suggest there is a risk of losing talented staff. The survey also looks to reveal whether there are key themes or issues that clerks are experiencing which could suggest further research for finding solutions/improvements. Clerks can find the survey at <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/2JK653Y> and the deadline for responses is 1700 on Monday 16 June 2025.

PREVENT, PROTECT, AND RESPOND TO KEEP COMMUNITIES SAFE

Darren Carson, Prevention Team Leader at Northamptonshire Fire & Rescue Service (NFRS), wants your help to get his message out to communities...

"Here at NFRS we are currently embarked on a specific piece of community work that includes contacting a number of parish and town councils in our more rural areas to offer engagement with our Community Safety Officers around Fire, Road and Water safety.



We are particularly interested in engaging with these councils and the local groups they may be aware of such as village coffee mornings, W.I. meetings, resident groups etc in order to offer our safety talks. My colleagues Dan Noone and Neal King have already contacted several councils via email as part of their role as NFRS Community Safety Officers.

Our aim is to keep our communities safe and this includes our residents in more rural areas. We would be grateful for any support and we can be contacted for a discussion via below:

- *Darren Carson, Prevention Team Leader*
DCarson@northantsfire.gov.uk
- *Dan Noone, Community Safety Officer (North)*
DNoone@northantsfire.gov.uk
- *Neal King, Community Safety Officer (West)*
NKing@northantsfire.gov.uk

Community Safety Talks

The Northamptonshire Fire and Rescue Service (NFRS) Prevention team are actively involved in working with education providers, community groups, and partners with the aim of keeping our community safe through education and

advice. The team covers various subjects around the themes of fire, road and water safety.

Our sessions are adapted and delivered in an engaging way to suit the audience we are working with.

Home Fire Safety Visits

Northamptonshire Fire & Rescue (NFRS) staff are able to give families advice on making their homes safer from the risks of fire. We engage in various ways including telephone advice through to visiting the family home to engage with residents.

NFRS staff will ensure families have working smoke alarms, advise on devising an escape plan should a fire happen, safe bedtime routines as well as specialist advice should there be family members with additional complex needs or vulnerabilities that would make evacuation from the home difficult in an emergency.

More details around our free home fire safety visits including our online referral form and home fire safety self-checker can be found at <https://www.northantsfire.gov.uk/home-safety-checks>.

Partnership Work

NFRS also works with a number of partners around the county in order to keep communities safe, for example we work with partners in the Northamptonshire Safer Roads Alliance (NSRA). The NSRA offer a number of events for young, working, and mature drivers.

An example of one such event is our mature driver roadshows, which aim to assist those aged 60 plus to drive safer for longer. The next one is on 5 July 2025 at Moulton Community Centre. For details, please see <https://tinyurl.com/y7smhjj5> for details. The session is free to attend

We look forward to hearing from you and working together to keep our communities safe.”

UNITARY COUNCIL MAKE UP

Typically at local elections, one might expect a member attrition rate of up to one-third. A third of councillors retire at each four-year cycle and are replaced with new blood. Not so this time for North Northamptonshire Council (NNC) and West Northamptonshire Council (WNC), which experienced attrition rates of nearly two-thirds. That's a lot of experience and corporate knowledge leaving the councils.

Then there's the huge political shift from Conservative to Reform UK, meaning that the councils are barely recognisable from a month ago. The entire leadership of both administrations is completely new. The Reform UK councillors, many of whom have never held public office, bring a wealth of business and life experience, but very little knowledge of running an upper tier local authority responsible for adults' and children's services. The learning curve needs to be steep, and the focus needs to be sharp.

The election results were stark for the two traditional leading parties:

	WNC			NNC		
Party	Pre-Election	Post-Election	Change	Pre-Election	Post-Election	Change
Conservative	57	17	-40	55	13	-42
Independent	7	2	-5	2	1	-1
Green	-	-	-	3	8	5
Labour	20	9	-11	14	4	-10
Lib Dem	6	6	0	0	1	1
Reform	0	42	42	4	39	35
Vacant	3	0	-3	0	2	2
Total	93	76	-17	78	68	-10

Reform UK has 42 of 76 seats on WNC, and, so far, 35 of 68 seats on NNC. The two remaining vacancies on NNC are for the Higham Ferrers ward where the election was postponed due to the death of a candidate. The new election will take place on 12 June 2025.

It's also interesting to look at the geographical distribution across the former local government areas by party:

	WNC			NNC			
Party	SN	DAV	NOR	COR	EN	KETT	WELL
Conservative	8	6	3	0	6	3	4
Independent	1	-	1	0	0	1	0
Green	-	-	-	0	0	8	0
Labour	-	-	9	2	0	0	2
Lib Dem	2	4	-	0	1	0	0
Reform	8	9	25	11	10	8	10
Total	19	19	38	13	17	20	16

Labour was wiped out in the rural districts of South Northamptonshire, Daventry, East Northamptonshire and Kettering. In West Northamptonshire, 25 of the 38 Reform UK councillors (66%) are in Northampton.

And finally, we looked at gender balance by party:

	WNC			NNC		
Party	Male	Female	TOTAL	Male	Female	TOTAL
Conservative	10	7	17	8	5	13
Independent	1	1	2	1	0	1
Green	-	-	-	5	3	8
Labour	3	6	9	3	1	4
Lib Dem	4	2	6	1	0	1
Reform	33	9	42	34	5	39
Total	51	25	76	52	14	66

Of Reform UK's 81 councillors across Northamptonshire, 67 (83%) are male and 14 (17%) are female.

However one slices the councillor numbers, Reform UK is now the dominate party. With one or two notable exceptions, all are new to local government and bring fresh perspectives and new ideas. Detailed local policies are yet to emerge, but the work to scrutinise spending is underway and there have been a few headlines regarding the relatively small-beer issues of fly-tipping and flag flying.

Of note, is Reform UK's declared war on potholes, which will be music to the ears of many parish and town councillors. The difficulty is understanding how Reform will make any difference to the number of potholes filled and the quality of work. The national chair of Reform UK, Zia Yusuf, wrote on X: *"Whistleblowers are already coming forward to assist the Reform DOGE, before it's even formally launched. The reason why millions of taxpayers' money is spent on potholes yet they're never repaired properly is because Tier 1 contractors subcontract the jobs on a day rate, with no incentive for speed nor quality. That's why instead of using cutting edge tech like the JCB Pothole Pro, most councils are repairing potholes with pickaxes. Pickaxes. Iron age technology. We can't wait to share the full details of what we find."* Kier in Northamptonshire does have a pickaxe, but it also already has a Pothole Pro, so it might be that the savings and efficiencies are hard to find. Nevertheless, there is always more that can be done and always new ways to look at things, so time will tell.

COUNCILLOR DEVELOPMENT FRAMEWORK

The Councillor Development Framework (CDF) is Northants CALC's structured programme designed to support the continuous professional development of parish

and town councillors in the county. This framework is inclusive, recognising the diverse needs of both new and long-standing councillors, and offers opportunities for refresher courses to ensure that all councillors remain up to date with the latest practices and knowledge.



The CDF was developed following feedback from clerks and councillors who were unsure about the required training and its prioritisation. It incorporates advice

from sector-specific bodies such as the National Association of Local Councils (NALC) and the Local Government Association (LGA), as well as guidance from the National Training Strategy (NTS), Local Council Award Scheme (LCAS), and the Code of Conduct.



The framework is divided into four key stages, each focusing on different aspects of councillor responsibilities and skills:

- **Foundation:** This stage provides essential knowledge and skills that every councillor needs to work effectively. It includes key information and a broad understanding of the councillor's role.
- **Core:** Building on the foundation stage, this stage covers more in-depth topics such as finance, planning, and community engagement.
- **Advanced:** Designed for councillors who have completed the core stage and are looking to further develop their skills. It includes advanced training on leadership, strategic planning, and other high-level topics.
- **Leader:** Aimed at chairs, vice chairs, and aspiring chairs and vice chairs, this stage includes training on leadership skills and other leadership-related topics to prepare them for their roles.

The framework offers numerous benefits to both new and existing councillors:

- **Structured Learning Path:** The framework provides a clear and structured learning path, making it easier for councillors to understand what training they need to undertake and in what order.

- **Recognition of Previous Training:** Councillors who have already attended certain courses do not need to retake them to qualify for the framework. However, attending these courses again as a refresher is encouraged, especially if it has been several years since the initial training.
- **Flexible and Inclusive:** The framework is designed to be flexible, allowing councillors to complete the stages at their own pace and according to their availability. It also recognises the diverse needs of councillors and offers a mix of training, e-learning, and reading materials to cater to different learning styles.
- **Certification:** Councillors receive certificates for each stage they complete, providing formal recognition of their professional development.

Relevance to New and Existing Councillors

For new councillors, the CDF provides a comprehensive introduction to their roles and responsibilities, ensuring they have the essential knowledge and skills to perform effectively from the outset. It helps them navigate the complexities of their new role and provides a solid foundation for their ongoing development.

For existing councillors, the CDF offers opportunities to refresh and update their knowledge, ensuring they remain current with the latest practices and developments in local governance. It also provides advanced training and leadership development opportunities for those looking to take on more senior roles within the council.

In conclusion, the Councillor Development Framework is a vital tool for supporting the professional development of councillors, enhancing their skills and knowledge, and ultimately contributing to more effective and responsive local governance. By participating in the CDF, councillors can ensure they are well-equipped to serve their communities and lead their councils with confidence and competence. All councils should aspire to complete the Foundation stage as a minimum to ensure a solid baseline of knowledge and competence.

Please visit <https://northantscalc.gov.uk/councillor-development-framework> for more information on the Councillor Development Framework.

AND THE AWARD GOES TO...

Community contribution should be recognised, and Northants CALC regularly receives enquiries about long serving or retiring councillors and clerks that the council wishes to reward or recognise.

A carriage clock might be a bit passé these days, so what are the options available to a council?



- **Honorary Freeman/Freewoman** – Section 249 of the Local Government Act 1972 permits a parish or town council to confer the title of “honorary freeman” or “honorary freewoman” to persons of distinction and those who, in the council’s opinion, have rendered eminent services to the council’s area. The admission of an honorary freeman or honorary freewoman must be by resolution made at a meeting of the full council specially convened for such purpose and passed by no less than two-thirds of the members of the council.
- **British Empire Medal (BEM)** – British Empire Medals are awarded to local people who make a real difference to their communities. Awards are announced in either the New Year or Birthday Honours lists and recipients of BEMs in Northamptonshire will receive their medals from the Lord-Lieutenant in a ceremony at County Hall, Northampton. Whilst higher honours such as MBEs and OBEs are awarded for outstanding achievement or major national roles, the BEM is for “hands-on” service to the local community. The Lord-Lieutenant would like there to be more BEM nominations from Northamptonshire, so please think of worthy recipients and visit <https://www.gov.uk/honours> for nomination details.

A bunch of flowers or a bottle of whisky might be well-received, but they are soon gone and forgotten. An award such as Honorary Freeman/Freewoman or a BEM is enduring and will usually be received with great pride and humility. Community champions will rarely seek out their own accolades, so let’s make sure they are recognised for the wonderful contribution they make.

A CAUTIONARY TALE

It is always a good idea for councillors to have the utmost respect for clerks and other officers. That's not to say that clerks should not be scrutinised, performance-managed, and held to account, but there are ways and means of doing that, from annual performance appraisals to the more formal mechanisms of disciplinary procedures.

What is always a bad idea is for a councillor to be openly and publicly critical of their council's clerk on social media, even if they feel that the comments are justified or true.

A now former councillor to a small rural parish council in Norfolk learnt his lesson the hard way when he was sued for defamation by the now former clerk over an alleged campaign against him on Facebook. The judge found in favour of the clerk and awarded him £20,000 in damages saying that the councillor "*was plainly consumed with a very strong personal dislike*" of the parish clerk.

You can read the full story at <https://tinyurl.run/fBMEnl> (login may be required).

Criticising a member of staff in public is a red line. If any councillor has concerns about the performance or behaviour of a clerk or other officer, they should raise it informally and in confidence in the first instance with the chair of the council or, if there is one, the chair of the HR committee. Minor issues can often be nipped in the bud and can be dealt with quickly at the informal stage. More serious issues can be escalated through the disciplinary process, ultimately leading to dismissal of the officer if the complaints are upheld.

Councillors must respect the process and the outcome of the process. If a councillor raises a formal complaint and it is dealt with in accordance with the council's disciplinary procedures and dismissed, then the councillor must drop it and move on. Harbours grudges and pursuing personal vendettas is a very bad look for anyone, especially an elected member and holder of public office.

The case from Norfolk serves as a stark reminder that while accountability is crucial, the method of delivery is paramount. Maintaining respectful professional boundaries and utilising established internal procedures for disciplinary issues is not merely good practice; it is essential.

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