

Creating Northampton Town Council

The scope of this proposal

This paper outlines the proposal from the Northamptonshire County Association of Local Councils (Northants CALC) for the provision of consultancy services to assist Northampton Borough Council in the creation of Northampton Town Council from 1 January* 2020 through to 31 March 2021.

The proposal covers intensive support, including interim clerking support, councillor and clerk recruitment, training and induction for the council (with membership services additionally continuing to 31 March 2021). The aim is to ensure the council will be positioned to become fully and successfully embedded within their role over the next 15 months.¹

It is understood that workstreams needs to be prioritised with a commitment, for example, to initiate the councillor recruitment drives imminently. Additionally, the work would need to be conducted sensitively within a context of public and political scrutiny, to facilitate the activities of the new council rather than tie its hands.

With advice and services from Northants CALC, the council would be created with support from people committed to corporate success and with a perspective that strongly supports competent and active councillors, as well as officers. The proposal would be delivered by the Northants CALC team, its contractors and specialists, working in conjunction with the National Association of Local Councils (NALC) – see details of the Northants CALC team, Appendix 1. The Northants CALC Deputy CEO would be responsible for managing and delivering the project, working with and drawing on the wider team, as needed. The commitment is for 60 days consultancy and 20 days project management/administration. A portion of the work would be conducted remotely, with a growing presence in Northampton, including interim clerking in the early months of the council with adjusted support from when the permanent clerk is appointed through to the contract end.

¹ The estimated set up phase for a new council is 2 years. NALC Guidance 2011.

*Pending the decision of Northampton Borough Council

We are able to commit to commencement on 1 January 2020 and to accommodating an extended period of support should this be necessary after 30 September 2020, subject to agreement of terms.

We are happy to work with Northampton Borough Council to develop this proposal to suit. It has been carefully constructed as a package to ensure we can embark on the work without delay and can deliver it efficiently with suitable additional staffing cover. Changes or delivery of particular elements alone might affect the cost base.

What is unique about our offer?

Because we are a membership organisation specifically for Northamptonshire's town and parish councils, we have an inherent interest in the long-term success of Northampton Town Council. Our policies include promotion of strong local democracy and enhancement of the status of local councils across Northamptonshire. This proposal includes full membership services through to 31 March 2021 (including the National Association of Local Councils (NALC) fee). This will give the emerging council full access to the advice, information and training they need to help them to become fully established as an organisation that benefits the community, properly safeguards public money and assets and delivers responsive and high-quality services. The fee for the Northants CALC subscription and NALC fee for 15 month's support is a fixed amount of £8,169.46 which is incorporated within the overall sum.

As an organisation, based on our long experience of local councils, we help our members to:

- Identify and respond to the needs and ambitions of their communities.
- Clearly articulate their roles and deliver their visions.
- Understand the range of options for achieving their objectives.
- Think laterally and efficiently about service delivery and income generation and expenditure.
- Make intelligent choices and relationships with partners and projects.

When you work with us, you will have access to named officers and other specialist staff at Northants CALC, as well as access to NALC lawyers and information, and a wealth of experience within our network of County Associations, including the leading 7M Group of Associations (of which Northants CALC is a member). Furthermore, the NALC CEO has given us an undertaking that we will have their full support during delivery of this proposal. We also have access to local experts who can support important aspects of the services of the new council, such as websites and local council accountability and audit.

Northants CALC is the first port of call for councils seeking to review their structure, governance and financial efficacy which we deliver within our organisational review and internal audit work. One of the most important tasks of councils is to manage and safeguard its finances. Because we are a council support organisation, we are particularly conscious of the reputational and financial risks attached to failure on this front. As part of our responsibility to councils (as opposed to clerks), we are used to ensuring that fraud risks are minimised and have supported many councils to deal with potential and actual fraud.

Our expertise in the specialist area of parish and town council finance, includes running an expanding and high quality internal audit service for councils.

You will find us accessible and flexible, and as part of the preparation for this proposal we have ensured that we have additional resources available to ensure we can expand to provide the services required and also that we have access to the available expertise on which we would wish to draw.

A successful and expanding organisation, our experience with local councils in dealing with a considerable range of enquiries, training, information, organisational reviews, internal audit, payroll and other support gives us the ability to translate the commitment to create this council into a successful reality.

Costs

The project costs will be covered by Northampton Borough Council but it could choose to recharge the costs to the Town Council at a later date. The Consultancy and Project Management costs consist of 60 days consultancy and 20 days project management/administration.

Item	Cost	Phase
Membership services	£8,169.46	1 January 2020 to 31 March 2021
Project Management and Consultancy	£31,000.00	1 January 2020 to 30 September 2020
Training	£2,000.00	1 April 2020 to 30 September 2020
TOTAL	£41,169.46	

It must be noted that there will be supplementary staff costs from 1 April 2020 to support the new town council, these will be payable by Northampton Town Council and will be in addition to the costs above.

What we are offering

Our offer is a comprehensive package of support from 1 January 2020 through to 30 September 2020 delivered by relevant Northants CALC team members and drawing in additional expertise as needed, with membership services included until 31 March 2021.

Northants CALC has provisionally secured the services of local council consultant Richard Walden (see Appendix 1) and on adoption of this proposal will secure his services formally. Our preferred model would be that Northampton Borough Council appoints him as Interim Clerk and Proper Officer until a permanent Town Clerk is recruited, enabling him to take full responsibility and draw on the team as needed to deliver optimum support, depending on the particular service element that needs addressing.

The total cost is £41k covering the period from 1 January 2020 to 31 March 2021 and includes the following elements:

Framework documents

Council meeting rules and policy documents are required from the outset, to be adopted by the new council. These can all be revisited when the new council has time but Northampton Town Council would have all of the main policies and documents it needs in place from Day 1 in order to be able to make early day decisions and administer business, including suitably tailored Standing Orders and Financial Regulations based on the latest NALC model documents.

We would wish to ensure that members of the Shadow Town Council are fully engaged in the consideration of these documents and in the other matters set out below. In order that this can be achieved effectively, we would suggest the Shadow Council considers appointing a Steering Committee of, say, four or five members, who would be able to meet as frequently as required to discuss all relevant issues in detail before making recommendations to the full Shadow Council. A timetable of initial meetings would need to be agreed at an early stage.

Councillor support

Although Northampton Borough Council is creating the council and is statutorily responsible for organising the elections, Northants CALC will support Northampton Borough Council and the new council in respect of advice, training and information as well as the typical town and parish clerking support that would be expected for established councils during the creation period, elections and first meetings.

The success of any council depends on the calibre of elected councillors who reflect the diversity of the Northampton community. We will prioritise promoting standing for election and will run, or help run, public information events and provide material about the role of councillors and councils. We will encourage a diverse range of people to put themselves forward as candidates for election to the councils and provide the support they need for optimum performance of their role once in post. Although the reality is that larger councils tend to have a party-political element, we will maximise the ability of the council to focus on community outcomes and jointly plan for the future.

It is not unusual for councillors to receive insufficient support for their role within town and parish councils and this can create significant risks in larger councils. As an experienced training, advice and information organisation, our induction support and training will include:

- Corporate, councillor, chair/mayoral, Responsible Financial Officer and clerking roles and responsibilities
- Law and procedure
- Powers, duties
- Finance
- Community engagement and transparency

- Contributing to the planning system and shaping the parish/town
- Business planning and action plans
- Ethical conduct
- Leadership skills
- Dealing with social media and the press
- Effective partnerships
- Aspiration, benchmark standards and best practice
- The nature of a 'town' council and additional financial and accountability requirements for larger councils.

In particular we will facilitate an information dialogue with recently created town councils with large populations including Salisbury, Lowestoft and Weymouth to learn from their experiences during and immediately after the creation process. This will include qualitative and quantitative statistics on potential performance.

Northants CALC would establish a Code of Conduct for consideration and adoption by the council and would create relevant declarations and registers of interests and would facilitate the election of a chair/mayor and a deputy at the first meeting of the council.

Northants CALC would ensure that an appropriate structure was delivered which would enable the council to manage its decision-making and business effectively including through the formation of appropriate committees and sub-committees. Due support will also be provided, within Northampton, to whether a mayoral title will be adopted and the extent of the council's civic and ceremonial role.

Clerking, office and administration

As aforementioned, Northants CALC will organise interim clerking support until the permanent clerk is appointed and will support the recruitment process for the permanent clerk (and separate Responsible Financial Officer if appropriate) along with the establishment of terms for these posts. Northants CALC will also provide transition support for the new clerk until 31 March 2021. This will include supporting the clerk and council through any structural and organisational review and plans as well as any related staff transfer processes.

Northants CALC will support the new council to arrange suitable office environments, communication systems, administration, data management and record depositories. This will include ensuring appropriate risk management and business continuity can take place within adopted policies and plans.

Finance and Transparency

We believe this is one of the most significant areas for any council and the level of public scrutiny will be much higher with the new council. The accountability requirements for local councils are a specialist area and need to be considered from a corporate and public perspective and with due regard to transparency and accountability requirements. We will

support the council to ensure it has a suitable Responsible Financial Officer on an interim and then permanent appointment basis and that suitable internal audit arrangements are made. From the outset, we will facilitate the ability of the council to monitor against its budget with due checks and balances within suitable Financial Regulations.

We will work with the new clerk and council to define, establish and embed their optimum services and facilities portfolio within the parameters of their finances and community needs. The new council will need to carefully consider the related management and budgeting arrangements and we will support any discussions about asset and staff transfers and, importantly, the opportunities to think laterally about income generation.

Risk management will be an important part of the work that Northants CALC will facilitate with due regard to the increasing regulatory control over local councils.

We will ensure Northampton Town Council has a web site presence which will include relevant and required financial information.

Community engagement, communication and partners

Emerging and new councils must have credibility. A major part of this is communicating effectively with the community and partners, including the press, as well as within the councils themselves.

As well as the interim web site presence Northants CALC will progress other electronic and hard copy means of communication. Key partners will be identified and Northants CALC will facilitate a process of initial engagement of the new council with those community, public service and business partners.

The overarching objective is to ensure that there is a full understanding of the role and value of the new council and how the community and partners can interact with it. This will also include exploring with the new council and its clerk the ways in which the council can identify community needs and appropriate responses.

Service Delivery

Whilst the primary role of the new town council will be to ensure the community maintains a democratically accountable representative voice especially following the creation of the new West Northamptonshire Council, it will also have an important role in the delivery of local services. The draft Order creating the new council would give an indication of some services and functions which may be transferred to the new council. If required Northants CALC will provide advice, guidance and business planning support in respect of additional transferred services and will act on the new council's behalf in relevant negotiations with NBC.

Another key role of the new Town Council will be to maintain the town's proud heritage and rich civic traditions including preserving the continuity of the Mayoralty after 1 April 2021 and our team have extensive experience in advising in this regard.

The key test would be: Is a service relevant exclusively or mainly to the town and would it more effective, efficient and responsive to the needs of the local community if it was delivered locally? This could apply to services provided by the Borough Council but also possibly to some services currently delivered by the County Council.

It is assumed that the new Town Council will accept full financial responsibility for any agreed services from 1 April 2020 but, taking advantage of the co-existence of the Borough Council during its first year, that arrangements for their management and possible staff transfers could be phased in during that first year.

Exclusions

The detail of this offer is subject to further exploration and refinement as required by the parties.

Among the specific exclusions are additional expenses, such as legal and HR fees associated with any asset and staff transfer, recruitment and related advertising, RFO/accountant costs, venues and related costs for events, payable by NBC or the new council, where appropriate and agreed.

Conclusion

The Borough Council and its staff will be fully engaged in continuing to deliver essential services until 31 March 2021 whilst preparing for the creation of the new West Northants Council on 1 April 2021. We believe this proposal will relieve the Borough of the detail of creating a new Town Council and that the extensive skills and experience of the Northants CALC team as detailed above will enable the new Town Councillors to provide as effective a representational voice for the local community as possible and to deliver all services efficiently and successfully.

Appendix 1: The Northants CALC Team

Working with the National Association of Local Councils, the Northants CALC team comprises:

Chief Executive Officer

Danny Moody

Danny reports to the board of directors and is responsible for ensuring the smooth and effective management of the organisation. Danny is himself a parish councillor and he holds the Certificate in Local Council Administration and is a Principal (Affiliate) Member of the Society of Local Council Clerks. Over the past twelve years Danny has a reputation for providing exceptional support to parish and town council in Northamptonshire and for being a strong and effective advocate for the sector. As a founder member of the 7M group of leading County Associations, Danny is a respected officer nationally and has been on and led various national projects. Danny approaches any situation with a calm objectivity and is known for his knowledge of and commitment to local government in Northamptonshire.

Deputy Chief Executive Officer

Lesley Sambrook Smith

Lesley joined Northants CALC in 2017 following 6.5 years as a parish clerk. Lesley holds the Certificate in Local Council Administration and is the lead officer helping to create and support new councils in Northamptonshire. Lesley has worked with Corby Borough Council and is working with Daventry District council to support new council projects. As well as this specific role, Lesley supports existing councils with enquiries via email and telephone and also provides bespoke whole council training courses.

Consultant

Richard Walden

Richard is one of the most experienced and well known professionals in the local council sector. He has a deep personal and professional interest in both Northamptonshire and town councils in general. He was born and educated in Wellingborough and started his career as an administrative trainee/ committee clerk for Northampton CBC from 1966 to 1974. During his last year with that council he assisted, on secondment, in the creation of a new integrated Leisure Department. He has remained a life long Cobblers supporter. At the 1974 reorganisation Richard moved to South Beds DC as senior committee clerk and then to Luton BC in 1979 as Principal Assistant/ Head of Democratic Services. In 1985 he was appointed as town clerk to the newly created Dunstable Town Council as its first employee. Over the next 22 years as clerk and responsible financial officer, he saw the town council expand dramatically taking on a wide range of services such as parks, cemetery, community centres, town centre management, TIC, youth services and market as well as negotiating agency agreements with the county and district councils. The budget expanded accordingly and when he took early retirement in 2007 Dunstable

raised the largest precept (over £2M) of any local council at that time. Richard has always supported other local councils and in 2005 was elected national President of SLCC, the professional body for local council managers. In 2007 Richard started his own consultancy and has worked for SLCC in several capacities including two spells (April – June 2007 and Dec 2015 – Feb 2017) as Interim Chief Executive. For the past 8 years has edited the Society's bi-monthly in house magazine, *The Clerk*. He has lectured extensively on the role and management of town councils and for 15 years was visiting lecturer at the School of Local Policy at Gloucestershire University. More recently he was instrumental in the new partnership between SLCC and De Montfort University for delivering higher education geared specifically to the needs of managers in local councils. Richard was the author of the National Association of Local Councils model Best Value Performance Plan for larger local councils and was co-author of Gloucs Uni guide to project management for local councils. He was also a practitioner member of the (then) DCLG working group which drafted the statutory guidance for conducting community governance reviews. In 2017 he was unanimously elected an Honorary Vice President of SLCC in recognition of his work for the local clerks' profession – only the 5th person in its 50 year history to be accorded this honour.

As well as SLCC, Richard has worked as an independent consultant to a number of large local councils on the recruitment and selection of a new Chief Officer, whole council or whole service reviews, and many best value exercises. In other commissions Richard has worked for the London Borough of Brent leading a number of projects related to its move to the new Wembley Civic Centre; as business development consultant to the National Association of British Market Authorities; and the (former) Standards Board for England helping to develop the capacity of local councils,

Richard holds a post graduate Diploma in Municipal Administration, the Certificate in Local Administration (CiLCA), and a Higher National Certificate in Business Studies. Richard is extremely grateful to Northampton Council in supporting his early training and professional education, remains very attached to the town and would consider it a great honour to be able to assist the new Town Council become fully established.