

Update

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CHIEF'S BRIEF

By Danny Moody, Chief Executive, Northants CALC

Firstly, a very happy New Year and I sincerely hope that 2010 is going to be a great year for us all.

Some of you have already noticed that in December I had a change of job title, from Principal Officer to Chief Executive. Same job, same responsibility (same pay!), just a different title. The "Principal Officer" title was a hangover from ACRE days but is rarely used in management these days, let alone local government. In fact, it's so unusual that if you Google "Principal Officer" I come up as the 14th search result! Chief Executive is more in keeping with the sector in which we work and makes my role within the organisation clearer to the outside world.

Most of you will know that Anne Millar has left Northants CALC to take up a fulltime position with the University of Northampton. Anne had been involved with Local Councils for more than seven years, either with the Association or as co-ordinator of the Calor Village of the Year competition for Northamptonshire. Anne saw through a lot of changes and development over the last two years and coped with it all admirably. I am sure you would join me in wishing Anne all the best in her new role. The Finance & Resources Officer (FRO) vacancy Anne leaves behind has been advertised and the closing date for applications is 5 February 2010. See below for details.

I am very pleased to report that our consultation on the Northamptonshire Councils' Charter was launched on 18 January 2010. I hope this will be one of the more meaningful consultation exercises for Local Councils and I look forward to your responses. More on the Charter appears below.

On 11 December 2009 I was delighted to attend the Northants Branch Society of Local Council Clerks (SLCC) Christmas Lunch, held in Greens Norton. When I get together with any group of clerks it always feels like a very close community of practice where sharing of technical knowledge and best practice takes place. I would urge all clerks to join the SLCC (www.slcc.co.uk) and to take every available opportunity to network with other clerks.

Finally, I would like to offer two personal congratulations. Firstly to Ann Le Druillenec for her stunning CiLCA performance and to Kilsby Parish Council for gaining Quality status. There's more on both achievements below.

WHAT ARE YOU TWITTERING ON ABOUT?

Northants CALC has joined Twitter – only the second CALC in England to do so. Twitter users can follow our Tweets at www.twitter.com/ceo_ncalc. Like it or not social media is here to stay and councils should be taking a long hard look at whether tools such as Twitter, Facebook, Blogs and web sites can play a part in their community engagement strategies.

It's true that social media is 99% dross, but there are some useful aspects of it too. And ultimately it is about communicating with the electorate in ways that they want. I imagine that when the telephone was introduced in Northamptonshire parishes some councils were slow to subscribe and publish a telephone number on which the electorate could contact them. Now all councils have a telephone number. The same with e-mail... 221 of the 259 parish/town councils and parish meetings have a publicly available e-mail address. To the 38 that don't I challenge you just to think about whether you are making yourself sufficiently available to the electorate.

If any councillors or clerks are on Twitter I would be interested to hear from you and to learn what practical benefits you have found so far. Please contact dmoody@northantscalc.gov.uk.

THE PERFECT SCORE

Ann Le Druillenec has been awarded the Certificate in Local Council Administration (CiLCA) and achieved distinction level in all twenty four modules. Ann is only the third person in England to achieve the perfect score since the CiLCA was introduced in 2002, and one of the two others was the training officer from the Hampshire Association!



Left to Right: Cllr Walter Mullis, Chairman, King's Sutton Parish Council, Ann Le Druillenec, Clerk, Cllr Pamela Gelder, Chairman, Croughton Parish Council.

It takes a very good portfolio to pass CiLCA first time, and to achieve a distinction in one module is a big achievement. Given the level of complexity and precision required with all the technical and legal references, delivering twenty four perfect modules is very impressive indeed.

Ann is clerk to King's Sutton Parish Council (electorate 1,696) and Croughton Parish Council (electorate 551), both in South Northamptonshire. Ann is pictured above with the chairs of the two councils holding her CiLCA certificate.

The next CiLCA course is due to start in April so if you are interested please contact Training & Development Officer, Kate Houlihan at khoulihan@northantscalc.gov.uk.

CRIMESTOPPERS – HELPS MAKE COMMUNITIES SAFER

Crimestoppers is a registered independent national charity which provides members of the public with a way of reporting information about crime and criminals anonymously. It is the only



UK charity focused on crime detection, and our unique contribution to community safety is the absolute guarantee of anonymity we give when someone calls 0800 555 111 to give information.

Some people will not communicate directly with the police. Others may be reluctant. They may be intimidated or afraid of retribution. We know that sometimes it's a call from a family member or a criminal passing information about another. Whatever the reason, it seems that those with the most important information often cannot pass it on.

The Crimestoppers message is a simple one:

1. If you have information about criminal activities you can call us anonymously and safely.
2. We don't ask your name and we don't trace your call.
3. We do ensure that your information reaches the police.

Because someone has given information anonymously they need not fear reprisals.

A cash reward may also be payable (if requested) where there is a subsequent arrest and charge.

Crimestoppers works!

It operates nationally with head office at Morden in Surrey. In practical terms operations are managed on a local regional volunteer basis although incoming calls to Crimestoppers on 0800 555 111 are received at several call centres around the UK. The information passed across by callers is not evidence which can be used in court, but it is part of the overall police jigsaw of intelligence.

Across the UK there is an average of nearly 250 actionable calls every day. Following from those, there are 20 arrests a day and on average one arrest a week for murder or attempted murder. In the eight months between April and November this year, 4,312 people were arrested and charged and over £16 million of property recovered and drugs seized. More information is available on our national website - www.crimestoppers-uk.org.

In Northamptonshire, last year alone, stolen property and prohibited drugs to the value of £700,000 were seized by Northamptonshire Police as a direct result of information supplied to Crimestoppers.

The Charity in the form of its volunteer supporters raises funds to promote the scheme to the public and encourage calls. We work with the police, obviously, but also, where applicable, with local authorities, businesses, schools and other local organisations.

Clearly, in encouraging people to call Crimestoppers, it is necessary to maximise the public's awareness of the 0800 555 111 number and to that end, we encourage councils to reproduce the Crimestoppers logo (as shown above) in any or all of their own local publications. Similarly, any local council that wishes to do so, is welcome to reproduce this article, whether in full or in part. Both can be supplied in a suitable format upon request to Northamptonshire Crimestoppers, PO Box 7059, Towcester, NN12 8WQ.

Donations, however modest, are of course always most welcome in defraying the cost of producing publicity materials and should be sent to the address above.

BEE REGISTERED

BeeBase is an award winning and important tool in the control of honey bee pests and diseases. The National Bee Unit (NBU) would like local councils to strongly encourage any beekeepers who keep apiaries on their land (ie. allotments, smallholdings etc.) to register on BeeBase. In the event that beekeepers are already registered councils may wish to note keepers' BeeBase registration numbers for their records. By raising awareness of BeeBase and the importance of registration councils would be helping towards sustaining a healthy honey bee population.

If councils could help by encouraging beekeepers who keep apiaries on their land to register whether they tend 1 or 100 apiaries, it would help considerably in raising awareness of BeeBase. Simply log on to www.nationalbeeunit.com to download a leaflet on BeeBase, which highlights the importance of registration and what beekeepers can expect to receive once registered.

DON'T LEAVE IT TO CHANCE

Councils face potential big payouts for leavers with unused holiday entitlement.

Workers who don't have specific holiday procedures written into their Employment Contracts could potentially claim back their full accrued holiday entitlement when they leave the Council.

If Employees are unable to use their total 5.6 weeks entitlement during a year – or claim they haven't used it, and the Council's ineffective recording of used / unused holiday is unable to provide contradictory evidence – they could claim back the total unused amount as a payment in lieu, and this could cover the whole of their period of employment.

In a recent Employment Appeal Tribunal case (Beijing Ton Ren Tang (UK) v Wand), an Employee who didn't have a written contract, or written details of how much holiday could be carried over from one year to the next, or effective holiday recording procedures, was able to claim 132 days payment for unused holiday covering the whole of her period of employment.

To ensure that they have protected themselves Councils need:

- Formal written terms and conditions which specify how much holiday workers are entitled to per annum; statutory minimum 5.6 weeks per annum, NJC entitlement starting at 21 days for full time workers plus Bank Holidays.
- A limit to the amount of unused holiday which can be carried over from one year to the next, if any.
- Effective procedures for monitoring the amount of leave that has been requested, taken and unused, which is agreed by both Employee and Clerk / Council.
- An entitlement for pregnant workers, or those on long term sick leave, to carry over holiday that have been prevented from using due to their condition into the next holiday year, to prevent any potential claims of Sex / Disability Discrimination and a breach of the Working Time Directive.

PROFILE

Christopher Moses is Managing Director of Personnel Advice & Solutions Ltd and a Fellow of the Chartered Fellow of the Institute of Personnel and Development. 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
FURTHER INFORMATION AND FACT SHEETS ARE AVAILABLE AT: www.personneladviceandsolutions.co.uk.

Remember that (however ridiculous it seems) under employment law holiday entitlement applies to all clerks, whether they work 3 hours per week or 30.

VAT ON MILEAGE

NJC car allowances 2009/10: change to VAT - 1 January 2010

Since 1 December 2008, VAT had been temporarily reduced to 15 per cent but has now returned 17.5 per cent as of 1 January 2010.

As a result, the amount of VAT per mile in the petrol element of the NJC car allowances has been amended. The amended VAT figures – applicable to the current NJC mileage rates until 31 March 2010 are available at

<http://www.northantscalc.gov.uk/?p=94>.

IT'S CHILD'S PLAY

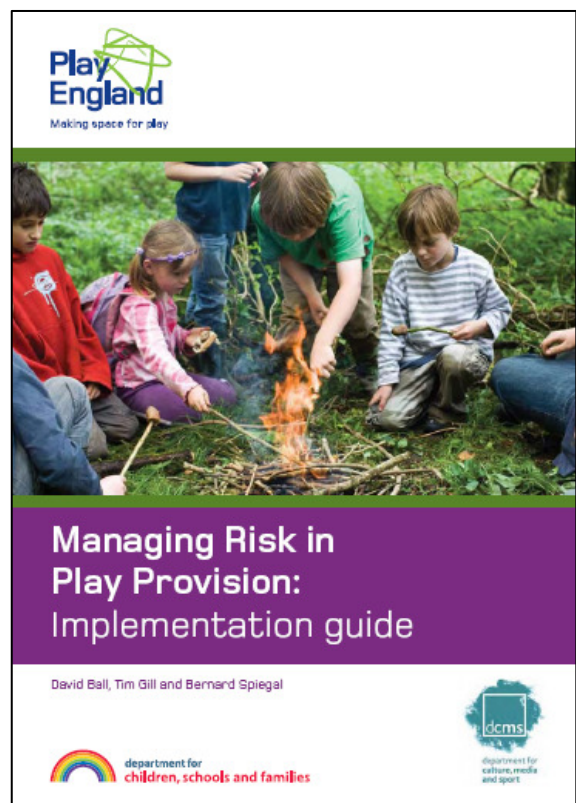
Remember when you were young, how much fun it was to play outdoors? Well, it's no different today, young people still love playing outdoors and it's good for them.

Having natural play experiences close to their home is an important part of every child's life, outdoor play keeps children active, healthy and happy. If you are thinking of ways for developing spaces for your community, then the Northamptonshire County Council (NCC) website www.northamptonshire.gov.uk will be a useful place to start. Once you're on the site, just type 'playbuilder' into the search.

Northamptonshire County Council successfully secured £1.1 million Playbuilder funding from the Department of Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) which has been helping local communities across the County to redesign and refurbish some existing areas to create challenging and inclusive play spaces for young people aged 8-13. Through working in partnership with all District and Borough Council Play Leads and Play Partnerships, the money is being allocated as grants to successful applicants. Between 2009-2011 over 22 new or refurbished playspaces will be created and we are currently working with a range of parish and town councils, 'friends of' groups and community organisations to develop play space projects.

Although application for the Playbuilder grant funding has now closed, its lasting legacy is to showcase a new approach for directly involving children, young people and the wider community in the design and creation of these spaces.

We are in the process of developing the NCC webpage which currently signposts you to good practice examples, names your local Play Lead and useful resources, it also includes links to the Play England website. The formation of Play England was an outcome of the Government investment in play (this is now a government national



delivery partner), working closely with local authorities and the voluntary sector to provide advice and support, ensuring that the importance of play is recognized by policy makers, planners and the public.

Does your Parish Council have responsibility for play provision, are you accountable for the management and maintenance of local play areas in your care?

Play England have published 3 key documents which might assist you - Design for Play, Nature Play: Maintenance Guide and Managing Risk in Play Provision: Implementation Guide. These are downloadable or hard copies can be obtained free, details given on the NCC website - Recommended Reading.

Design for Play (Shackell and others, 2008) is a comprehensive guidance document which explains a step-by-step approach aimed at inspiring creativity and imagination of what's possible for all those charged with commissioning, managing and developing public open spaces. It focuses on the design and strategic delivery of unsupervised outdoor environments within both urban and rural locations for play and informal recreation. This was adopted by the Government as the quality benchmark for new investments in play spaces, which sought to show that wherever practicable, natural features and integrated landscaping should be central to good play areas. This aspiration is not without challenge as public play areas need to be robust and easy to maintain, without breaking the budget. These are important considerations and the guidance Nature Play Maintenance Guide is aimed at exploring these issues in more detail.

Nature Play Maintenance Guide is written by landscape architects and play specialists, and includes some useful procedures for the maintenance of more innovative play spaces.

Another key publication is Managing Risk in Play Provision: Implementation Guide which helps providers to strike a balance between the risks and benefits of offering children challenging play opportunities.

'Children and young people need and want to stretch and challenge themselves when they play. Play provision and play space that is stimulating and exciting allows children to encounter and learn about risk. This helps them to build

confidence, learn skills, and develop resilience at their own pace' Play England Charter for Children's Play.

If after looking at the NCC website you would like more information, please contact: Carole Jones, Project Manager – Playbuilder, Northamptonshire County Council. cajones@northamptonshire.gov.uk.

CHARTERING A NEW COURSE

On 18 January 2010 Northants CALC launched a consultation on “Parish Partnerships - the Northamptonshire Councils' Charter”. The Charter is a new document that has been developed between the three tiers of local government in the county, with Northants CALC as the lead agency. The aim of the Charter is to describe the working relationship between Local Councils and Principal Councils in Northamptonshire.

It's now your council's turn to feed in your views, comments and suggestions. I know that clerks and councils often suffer from consultation fatigue but I am hopeful that this one is slightly different because it relates directly to local councils in Northamptonshire and covers subjects and issues that are the day to day bread and butter of local council life. If you only respond to one consultation this Spring, then this is the one!

Please put this on your agendas and make sure all councillors as well informed about it. This is an opportunity for local councils to grasp the opportunity of devolution, community empowerment and localism and to play an enhanced role in the governance of the county.

The consultation runs until 31 March 2010 so please act now. The intention is to sign off the final Charter at the Local Councils' Conference, which has now been set for Wednesday 16th June 2010 at Towcester Race Course (time to be finalised, but will probably be afternoon/evening).

Please give thought to who from your council will attend the Conference this year and make sure they have the date in their diary in advance. Formal invitations will be sent to all councils in due course.

If you have any questions please do not hesitate to contact me at any time at dmoody@northantscalc.gov.uk.

SHLAA, SHMAA?

Local Councils in West Northamptonshire will have been doing battle at their January meetings with their SHLAAs (Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessments).

The purpose of a SHLAA (and all Local Authorities have to develop one) is to:

- identify sites with potential for housing;
- assess their housing potential; and
- assess when they are likely to be developed.

The trouble is that planners are drawing lines on maps without any regard to the environmental status of the land, its ownership or whether it is inside or outside the village framework (an imaginary line around a settlement outside which development control is more restricted).

So are SHLAAs a harmless audit of land that will provide useful data for the future, or are they a sinister and underhanded “thin end of the wedge” and that once a piece of land is identified via the SHLAA then it is only a matter of time before it comes under development pressure? Local councils will have to make up their own mind – and respond to their SHLAA accordingly.

Further information and guidance on SHLAAs is available at:

<http://www.communities.gov.uk/publications/planningandbuilding/landavailabilityassessment>

NATIONAL TRAINING STRATEGY REVIEW

The National Training Strategy (NTS) was born of the Government’s Rural White Paper in 2000. The Strategy itself was agreed and published in November 2001. Much has been achieved over the last eight years. Including:

- delivery of core qualification for clerks (The Certificate in Local Council Administration <http://www.nalc.gov.uk/Training/CiLCA.aspx>) and its award to approaching 1,000 candidates;
- new training materials and courses for parish councillors;

- a bursary scheme <http://www.nalc.gov.uk/Training/Bursary/Bursary.aspx> to support training in smaller parish councils (which has benefitted about over 1200 clerks;
- provision of train the trainers training;
- an agreed approach to Continuous Professional Development <http://slcc-cpd.dyndns.info/cpdinfo.asp> for clerks and others;
- a delivery mechanism through County Training Partnerships which brings co-ordination and joint planning between training providers in most areas http://www.nalc.gov.uk/Training/Contacts/CTP_Contacts.aspx

The NTS partners have now agreed to review the Strategy. They have established a group to conduct the review and will agree and produce a final NTS by the end of May 2010.

For full details, and to submit your response online, please visit: www.ntshub.org.uk.

TRAINING AND DEVELOPMENT FOR LOCAL COUNCILS

By Kate Houlihan: Training and Development Officer

13th Quality Council for Northamptonshire

Northamptonshire has just gained its 13th Quality council. In spite of the snow the quality accreditation panel meeting scheduled for the 11th January went ahead and the outcome was that Kilsby Parish Council was awarded Quality status. Many congratulations to the Councillors and Clerk at Kilsby Parish Council for their excellent submission.

Rob Chamberlain, Chairman of Kilsby Parish Council, said he was lucky to work with forward thinking councillors who were both proactive in their community and who could see the benefits of attaining Quality status. This was evident in the portfolio and the panel were very impressed with both the quality of the portfolio and the work the council are doing in their community.

So very well done to the councillors at Kilsby and of course congratulation also to the clerk Catherine Camp.



**QUALITY
PARISH
COUNCIL**

In order to gain Quality status councils must submit a portfolio of evidence which demonstrates that they meet a wide range of competencies and that they are active in their communities.

Once a portfolio has been completed it is put to the Quality Accreditation panel for Northamptonshire. The panel have extensive experience of working with the Town and Parish sector and whilst a portfolio will be subject to a rigorous review this does mean that Councils who successfully achieve Quality Status can be really proud of their achievements.

The number of CiLCA qualified clerks is starting to increase rapidly in Northamptonshire; having a qualified clerk is one of the criteria for Quality status so we very much hope that many more councils will now be working towards Quality. If your council is considering attaining Quality Status then please do contact the Association as we are able to support councils in a number of ways:

- We can arrange a visit to your council to explain the quality scheme
- The training and development officer can assist in compiling the portfolio
- We will review your final portfolio prior to submission

I look forward to hearing from you.

Training 2010

Unfortunately Christmas and illness delayed the publication of the 2010 training calendar! But work on this is now complete and hard copies will be being sent out to councils very shortly. The calendar will also be available on the Northants CALC website: www.northantscalc.gov.uk.

The new training program includes a wide range of new courses and we are working in partnership with a number of organisations to deliver a really varied program.

We are again working with Planning Aid to deliver a comprehensive program of training on development control, S106 agreements and the Planning Framework. In April we will be joined by the Allotment Association who will be running a session on setting up and managing allotments.

A Rospa accredited play safety expert will be taking a course on playground safety in May, which I know is a key issue for many councils.

Also in May we will be running an employment workshop. This will be the first workshop we have run on this really key area and we will be looking at legislation, a range of case studies, experts in employment law, tax and national insurance will also be on hand to answer your queries.

November sees a repeat of the highly successful Grant Funding Day with speakers from a variety of funders.

All of these new courses will be running alongside our core training course for new clerks, councillors and of course our CiLCA program. In addition to this we are happy to tailor a program to meet the needs of your council and we can arrange a bespoke training course for your council.

So hopefully there will be something for everyone!

If you have any queries do give me a call on 01327 831482 or email training@northantscalc.gov.uk.

NALC'S LOCAL COUNCIL AWARDS

NALC's Local Council Awards has some great prizes up for grabs for the lucky winners. Prizes include two-night breaks for two, and £500 contributions towards a community project. All winners will have the honour of collecting their certificates and prizes at an awards ceremony.

It is widely recognised that the vast majority of local councils (parish and town councils) are delivering great services and acting as a voice for their local communities on a day-to-day basis. It is in honour of this, that NALC is renewing its Local Council Awards this year.

NALC is looking for good practice from councils regardless of size or location. It is looking for councils, councillors, clerks and workers who are really making a difference in their community.

Undoubtedly, these are tough times to be involved in democratic institutions. With the expenses scandal, all forms of governance, be that local or national, are being "tarred with the same brush". But these awards show how the most local form of governance is still connected and responding to the needs of its electorate and residents.

This year's NALC Local Council Awards will be in the categories of:

- Council of the year sponsored by AON;
- Clerk of the year sponsored by AON;

- Councillor of the year sponsored by the Commission for Rural Communities (CRC);
- Council worker of the year sponsored by The Co-operative Bank;
- Much improved council of the year sponsored by Standards for England.

NALC would like to thank all the sponsors for their support in helping to make these awards a success.

The closing date for applications is 31 March 2010.

For further information about the awards criteria and application details please see www.nalc.gov.uk.

SITUATIONS VACANT

Finance & Resources Officer – Northants CALC

Location: Litchborough, Northamptonshire (office based)
Hours: 25 hours a week (flexible, occasional evening/weekend meetings)
Salary: SCP 15 – 17 (£16,054 - £16,830) pro rata (i.e. £10,847 - £11,372)
Term: Permanent

The Northamptonshire County Association of Local Councils (Northants CALC) provides member services to parish and town councils in Northamptonshire. We have an immediate vacancy for someone to join our small, busy team providing finance and administration support. This is a good opportunity to work as part of a dedicated and vocational team and to help make a real difference to local government in Northamptonshire.

For full details please visit <http://www.northantscalc.gov.uk/?p=88>.

To advertise your vacancy please send details to info@northantscalc.gov.uk.

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