

PARISH COUNCILS LIAISON GROUP

Minutes of the meeting held on Wednesday, 25th April 2012 at Retford Town Hall

Present:

Councillors: F Hart (Chair)
B A Bowles, H M Brand, G Freeman, T Rafferty, A Rhodes, J C Shephard and
Mrs K Sutton.

Parish Council Representatives: H Burton, J Evans, C Fraser, H Holdaway, E Jefferies,
A Stevenson and M Stokes.

Officers in attendance: G Blenkinsop, S Brown, J Hamilton and J Proudman.

Also in attendance: N Barton – Animal Wardens Ltd

Members of Standards Committee: None.

(The Chairman welcomed all to the meeting and read out the Fire Alarm/Evacuation Procedure.)

30. SUSPENSION OF COUNCIL PROCEDURE RULES FOR 15 MINUTES TO ALLOW QUESTIONS

There were no questions.

31. APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor M T Gray and Parish Councillors N Johnson and Mrs J Wratten.

32. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST BY MEMBERS AND OFFICERS

(a) **Members**

There were no declarations of interest by Members.

(b) **Officers**

There were no declarations of interest by officers.

33. MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 25TH JANUARY 2012

RESOLVED that the Minutes of the meeting held on 25th January 2012 be approved.

34. MINUTES FOR ACTION.

The Senior Manager Support Services reported that, with regard to Minute No. 27(c) – the political groups will be asked for their nomination(s) and the Nottinghamshire Association of

Local Councils (Bassetlaw) will also be asked for a representative; and with regard to Minute No. 27(d) – all parish councils will be contacted during June to ascertain any issues/concerns.

RESOLVED that the Minutes for Action be received.

35. OUTSTANDING MINUTES LIST

RESOLVED that the Outstanding Minutes List be received.

SECTION A - ITEMS FOR DISCUSSION IN PUBLIC

Key Decisions

None.

Other Decisions

36. ITEMS SUBMITTED BY BASSETLAW DISTRICT COUNCIL

(a) Dog Warden Service

The Principal Environmental Health Manager advised the Group that ten officers had recently received training from Barnsley Metropolitan Borough Council on enforcement action and practical working in the town centres. Dog fouling patrols had commenced and this was to be intensified over the next few weeks in 'hot spots'. £50 fixed penalty notices will be issued once the administrative system has been set up. The training could be rolled out to parish councils, Tenants and Residents Associations and other community groups, upon request. The Police are currently responsible for dangerous dogs, although this may change with new legislation.

Nigel Barton, Animal Wardens Ltd, introduced himself and explained the service which he has provided to Bassetlaw District Council since 1997. This encompasses a proactive role of encouraging responsible dog ownership and a reactive role of dealing with dog owners who do not comply, e.g. dog fouling and stray/abandoned dogs. The number of stray/abandoned dogs is increasing both locally and nationally, probably due to the economic climate, and bull terriers in particular are being dumped. There is a responsibility to keep any stray dog for seven days and if not claimed by the 8th day, it is donated to the rescue centre at Carlton Forest, which has a reasonable homing record, although reclamation rates have decreased to 25%. Over £25,000 is spent each year on keeping stray dogs which total approximately 400 per year, with 60 being reclaimed and 90 being put to sleep. Any dog with behavioural problems is put down.

Nigel is also a trained micro-chipper and there is a £13 charge for a home visit, which is considerably cheaper than taking a dog to the vet. Advice on dog ownership is also given.

Patrolling areas prone to dog-fouling is undertaken and involves engaging with dog walkers, posting signage and leaflets, visiting and apprehending those who do not clean up after their dogs. Far more people now carry bags, compared to ten years ago, but there is still a minority of irresponsible dog owners in the area. Dog mess can be deposited in any litter bin and extra bins can be requested through the Council's Environment Services.

Questions/issues/comments asked/raised/made included: the provision of dog bins and signage; yearly figures and costs; signage and leaflet drops; micro-chipping; changes to legislation

AGREED that:

1. Environment Services be asked to contact Carlton-in-Lindrick Parish Council regarding the provision of extra bins.
2. Parish councils contact the Dog Warden on 01909 533219 during office hours if any assistance and/or advice is required.
3. Thanks be recorded to N Barton and J Proudman for their attendance and useful information.

(N Barton and J Proudman left the meeting at this point.)

(b) Localism Act

The Corporate Development and Policy Manager gave a presentation on the Localism Act, a copy of which was tabled, together with a copy of the 'Plain English Guide to the Localism Act'. Further advice can be found on the Government's website: <http://communityrights.communities.gov.uk>

The presentation outlined: an overview of the Act; the bigger picture; Community Right to Challenge – process, expression, timetable for implementation, submission, Council's response, grounds to reject an expression of interest, procurement, support available to communities, dates; Community Right to Bid – process, community value, timetable, compensation claims, register of assets; and Standards – abolition of Standards for England and the regime, adoption of a new Code of Conduct, and the disclosure of disposable pecuniary interests (DPIs).

Questions/issues/comments asked/raised/made included:

Community Right to Challenge - monitoring of any challenges; statutory procurement responsibilities; the lack of guidance; transparency of process; what services can be provided through the challenge process; and liaison between the District Council and town/parish councils.

Community Right to Bid – the relevance of Neighbourhood Plans; and commercial sensitivity.

Standards – concern that the new legislation comes into force from July 2012 and there is no guidance and/or new process in place.

AGREED that:

1. Concerns about the timetable for the new code of conduct be brought to the attention of the Council's Monitoring Officer for a response to parish councils.
2. Parishes be advised of the Government's nominated delivery partner that will provide direct support to communities once this is known.
3. A register of available Council-owned land be drafted for use by town/parish councils.
4. Thanks be recorded to G Blenkinsop for her informative presentation.

(c) Bassetlaw App

The Senior Manager Support Services circulated a flyer on the new Bassetlaw App which is a free, downloadable app for smart phones, available from the Apple and Android markets, which enables you to submit a report to the appropriate local authority anywhere in the country.

AGREED that the new Bassetlaw App be noted.

37. ITEMS FROM PARISH COUNCILS

(a) Improving Communications between Bassetlaw District Council and Town/Parish Councils (submitted by Harworth Town Council)

The representative for Harworth Town Council raised issues concerning communication with the District Council:

The Town Council “discovers” plans for its area, decisions are made above their heads, they are not involved or consulted; some departments are better at responding than others; there’s a “patchwork quilt” approach. The District Council advocates that it wants more partnership working but this is not supported by its approach. When they contact a Council Department, the officer promises to get back or take action but nothing happens, even when chased, which leads to frustration. They have been trying to purchase an asset from the District Council for three years and this has not yet been completed.

Parish Councillor Miss Stokes supported these concerns as she had been trying to get an answer to something from before Xmas 2011.

Dave Langmead said that the quarterly meetings of the Group are not sufficient, and hopes that the proposed steering group will meet on a monthly basis. However, he felt that he gets an excellent service from the District Council, particularly from the Planning Policy Team which has been helping Sturton develop its Parish Plan.

Councillor Mrs Sutton commented that communication within and from the District Council in general is quite poor and she often finds herself embarrassed that she doesn’t know what is happening in her own Ward. This has been raised at recent Scrutiny Panel meetings.

Two ladies in the audience praised the District Council’s responses and that their issues were resolved immediately. One went on to add that maybe the officers who had dealt with an issue previously were no longer in post due to the austerity measures and job cuts/voluntary redundancies.

AGREED that:

1. The issues/concerns be taken back to Bassetlaw District Council’s Management Team.
2. Specific complaints be investigated by relevant officers and responses made to the town/parish council.
3. The previously agreed working group be set up as soon as practicable after the May elections to engage with the town/parish councils.

(b) Funding for the Post of Rural Officer (submitted by Sutton Parish Council)

The representative for Sutton Parish Council raised the issue of the decreased funding for the Rural Officer and its effect on the rural community.

The Senior Manager Support Services explained that the District council gave £15,000 to the Rural Community Action Network (RCAN) annually to fund its activities. Three years ago, RCAN asked the District Council for further funding of £17,000 for the post of the Rural Officer. Further funding was agreed for a three-year period which came to an end in March 2012. Because of this, Karen Tarburton’s time will be split between Bassetlaw (two days per week) and Newark & Sherwood (three days per week). If the parishes contribute to the funding for Karen, then additional days per week will be spent in Bassetlaw.

AGREED that the verbal report be received.

38. ANY OTHER BUSINESS WHICH THE CHAIRMAN CONSIDERS TO BE URGENT

(a) Concurrent Grant

Parish Councillor G Brown raised the issue of the concurrent grant being axed next year and said that a response from Bassetlaw District Council would be requested at the next meeting of the Group.

AGREED that it be noted that the request would be made to Members at the next meeting of the Group.

As there was no other business to be discussed the Chairman closed the meeting, after thanking everyone for their attendance.