

The CLERK

SLCC

For Local Council Professionals

SPECIAL FEATURE

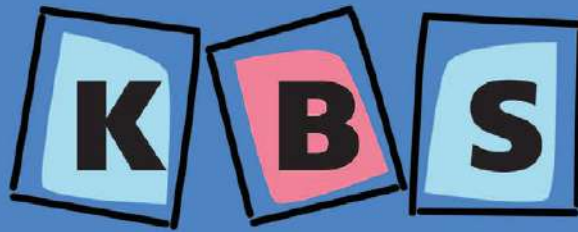
- ALLOTMENTS

- THE NATIONAL ALLOTMENT SOCIETY
- TEAMWORK AND NEW ALLOTMENTS
- ALLOTMENTS AND THE PLANNING SYSTEM

FREE
2024 DESK
CALENDAR
ENCLOSED

- PROCUREMENT AND TENDERING
- COLLABORATION ONE VOICE
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NOVEMBER 2023



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WELCOME!

Love them or hate them, allotments are this edition's special feature topic. Whereas I never had to deal with allotments directly in my previous role as clerk, I did use to have one when my children were very young. It was a fantastic way to spend time as a family - the children would dig for 'treasure', finding mostly old broken pottery pieces or rusty old nails, whilst my husband and I would turn the soil, plant seeds, or gather crops, depending on the time of year. Not only was it educational - in this family as much for the adults as the children - it was also such a fantastic feeling when it came time to harvest the fruits of all our hard work! The sense of community cannot be underestimated, with other allotment holders yes, but also, at one point, our kind neighbour at home who had very helpfully looked after our allotment when we were away one year, decided she loved it so much she started coming along with her own children to share in the endeavour!

Thank you to everyone who has contributed to this edition. Feedback in the 2023 membership survey in relation to magazine content highlighted a lack of articles geared towards smaller town, parish and community councils. As such, from January, we have decided to include a regular column dedicated to and written by smaller town, parish and community council clerks. If this is you and you would like to contribute, please get in touch with me on editor@slcc.co.uk.

2024 special feature topics have now been agreed and are listed below. To allow us to focus on a wider range of subjects, we have decided to trial the January edition with no special feature topic. We would love to hear your feedback!



Line Djuve-Wood
Editor

Forthcoming Special Features

Get in touch to share your case studies. We have a varied selection of special features, offering clerks plenty of opportunities to contribute to the following editions:

January	No special feature
March	Community Engagement – including Cohesive Communities and Youth Councils
May	Green Initiatives, Strategies and Net Zero, and D-Day 80th Anniversary
July	Playground and Recreation Ground Management
September	Information Technology and Digital Health
November	Staff Management and Retention

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We also want to hear about your innovative projects, successes, as well as any projects that may not have gone to plan and why – contact the editor to share your article ideas on the email address: editor@slcc.co.uk

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All information correct at time of going to print.



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ROB'S REFLECTIONS

This edition of our magazine is a delight for me. I've never had an allotment, but I've always wanted one. I'm enamoured with the idea of allotments. It seems to me a deeply egalitarian thing to provide green space which community members can keep and tend, and on which they can grow produce and engage in all sorts of enriching activities. I've had enough conversations with clerks to know that allotments can be a bit of a headache so I must temper my affection with due regard for the work they can create for my members!

Some years ago, the allotments at the bottom of my road were paved over in the pursuit of parking spaces for rail passengers at the nearby station. Notwithstanding my involvement (in a previous life) with the station upgrading work, it was a source of great sadness to me. And it does not help to note that those very parking spaces are, today, barely used after the construction of a brand-new multi-storey station car park on the other side of the tracks. I promise myself that one day, when I've got time, I'll launch a campaign for their reinstatement.

I love that allotments are measured in rods, perches, and poles and that they date back to (at least) Anglo Saxon times. I love that there is something quintessentially 'hyper-local' about them, often run by committees of the committed and enthused. With due regard for my members' workloads, it strikes me as wonderfully democratic that a small group of active folk in a community can make representations to request the provision of allotments. Their fundamental purpose, their governance, the community engagement they can engender and some of the outcomes of their provision and use mean that, all in all, allotments are to be celebrated. And, of course, during the Covid-19 pandemic, they caused huge confusion until the government determined that their use constituted exercise and so they could remain open. Allotments seem to permeate the business of local councils on a pretty frequent basis one way or another.

Our 2023 membership survey indicated that more than half of our members provide allotments for their communities. A 2022 report by the Association for Public Service Excellence (APSE) reported on the state of allotments (<https://www.apse.org.uk/index.cfm/apse/members-area/briefings/2022/22-33-state-of-the-market-allotments/>) and it's interesting to note (among a number of interesting statistics) that more than 86% of authorities reported an increase in demand for allotments as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic. I'd suggest that the increase in demand is the result of an increasing awareness of the benefits of self-grown produce as well as a function of the cost of living crisis. All in all, it feels like the time for allotments has come – if, indeed, it ever went away – and, for both personal and professional reasons, I'm delighted that this edition of The Clerk puts them in the spotlight. I hope you find it interesting and helpful.



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CLERK OF THE COUNCIL



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WELCOMING SLCC'S NEW PRESIDENT

Malcolm Nicholson PSLCC is Town Clerk of Weston-super-Mare Town Council, the third largest council in England by population, having been appointed in 2009. He is also Chair of the SLCC Somerset Branch. He has a law degree from the University of Warwick and following a brief period with a private firm and further studies qualified as a solicitor in 1983 when he joined Norfolk County Council.

Malcolm has over 40 years experience in local government, initially working on a variety of legal work for three different principal councils. At North Somerset Council he managed a department including Democratic, Registration and Electoral Services as well as Legal Services and attended and advised full council meetings. He was also monitoring officer for 12 years from 1997, advising parish and town councils and standards committees, before joining Weston-super-Mare Town Council.

During Malcolm's 14 years as town clerk, the town council has expanded, doubling its turnover and taking on new assets, including a new wellbeing park and developing a water park on the sea front. The town council saved the Weston Museum from closure and following a lottery funded £1.5 million refurbishment runs it as a vibrant community hub. Other services include an 18 acre cemetery, a 200 seat community theatre, 21 play areas, five public toilets and six allotment sites, all of which have been invested in and improved.

Malcolm has developed closer working with local voluntary sector bodies, including the YMCA who now provide the town's youth services, South West Heritage Trust and Citizens Advice. During the 2020 lockdown an eight staff Community Resilience team was established to work with local volunteers supporting vulnerable people, community work which continues to date.

Under Malcolm's leadership the council has focussed on equality and diversity, making an Anti-Racism Pledge, supporting Pride festivals, doing equality impact assessments on all services and developing only the second fully accessible SEND play area in the county. His council has also made a Climate Pledge committing to achieving net zero emissions by 2030. It has recently acquired the freehold of the grade 2 listed Mercury building in the town centre as a new headquarters, meeting chamber, tourist information office and voluntary sector hub and will be moving in during 2024 following extensive refurbishment, including rooftop solar generation.

During his year as president, Malcolm, as an ex-monitoring officer is keen to promote the Civility and Respect project. He is supporting two charities, the Alzheimer's Society which funds both research and practical support for people suffering from dementia; and the SLCC Educational Trust supporting clerks with their professional development and training.

Malcolm lives with his wife Joanne and his activities outside work include a keen interest in history, CADW membership, gardening, Morris dancing and country walks with their dog.

Each year the president is supported by sponsorship from businesses working in the local council sector. Malcolm is extremely grateful for the support given to him by CCLA, James Hallam, Microshade VSM and Vaughtons.

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UNDERSTANDING THE TENANCY AGREEMENT



Liz Bunting, Legal and Operations Manager at the National Allotment Society (NAS), offers a comprehensive insight into allotment agreements.



A brief introduction to allotment agreements and what should be included

Allotment land throughout England and Wales can be held in many different ways. The law is complex and has been in existence for years. NAS provides a range of tenancy agreements to cover many different circumstances for their members, in line with legislation.

What are the options?

Freehold ownership

This gives the right to use the land forever but may be subject to certain restrictions as to how the land is used. In many cases the land will have been given to a group many years ago either by a local landowner, the local council, or in some instances an allotment association may have had an opportunity to purchase land themselves. This will provide a very valuable asset and groups need to ensure costs are considered associated with buying and maintaining the land. Groups who have been through this process usually have limited company status to have the legal capacity to own the land in their own right.

Lease (tenancy agreement)

This agreement gives a right to exclusive possession of land belonging to someone else (the landlord) for a defined period. Where statutory allotment land is concerned the rights between landlord and tenant are governed by legislation 1908 – 1950, also by the agreement made by the parties. The intention of a document of this kind is to protect both landowner and tenant by outlining responsibilities and rights. It is important that both understand the boundaries of what they can and cannot do.

Licence

In many instances, it may be difficult to distinguish between a lease and a licence, as they may be very similar, a document labelled as licence could actually be a lease due to the wording included. The legal protection given by each type of agreement is

very different. A licence is merely permission to be on the land legally rather than being a trespasser, it simply permits the use of an area of land. This type of agreement does not comply with the requirements under allotment legislation for the provision of statutory allotments.

Different types of allotment agreements

Allotment plots can be let as 'direct let' sites where the landlord, council or otherwise have a tenancy agreement directly with the plot holder, this will be in the format of a 12-month agreement.

Many allotment associations take on some form of self / devolved management - in this instance the agreement will be between the landlord and the association in the form of a combined lease with management responsibilities, or lease for the land and separate management agreement. The term of the lease varies between five to 50 years in some instances. The agreement will contain a clause to allow the association to sub-let to individual plot holders.

A term of lease over seven years would need to be registered by the association under a compulsory scheme with the Land Registry - this protects the tenant association to obtain a right enforceable against third parties.

Who should sign the tenancy agreement?

In the case of a direct let tenancy agreement it would be the plot holder.

Where an association is taking on the agreement, as an unregistered group (not limited company) with no legal identity, then holding trustees would have to be appointed and the association's constitution should reflect the provision for this to happen. There should be provision for trustees to resign, or be removed, also for new trustees to be appointed. A minimum of two trustees should be appointed to sign the lease or the landowner may request three or four.



Another option would be for the association to enter into incorporation (become a limited company). There are a number of options available, and this may vary depending on the association's circumstances. NAS will give advice to members who are entering into new agreements, taking on self / devolved management or considering ownership of land.

Heads of Terms

A tenancy agreement / lease is a contract between parties and like any other arrangement of this kind is negotiable. During such negotiations, it may be appropriate for the landowner to produce a Heads of Term document. This will generally cover main clauses to be included, such as term of the lease, the rent, the area of the land, access, use of the land, insurance and termination.

What needs to be included in a tenancy agreement?

As an individual on a direct let site, when taking on a tenancy agreement the individual is entering into a legally binding document. The landowner of the site needs to ensure that the land is managed in a way outlined within the agreement. Therefore, the agreement will outline to the tenant exactly what can and cannot be done with the plot, this is an important part of having an allotment.

The terms and conditions required by law in an agreement will include:

- The names and addresses of the parties who form part of the agreement
- The area of land included with the agreement
- The term of the agreement, with an association to plot holder, or council to plot holder agreement, generally a 12-month term
- The amount of rent payable per annum and what extras may be included e.g. payment of water
- The date rent is due

- The tenants' obligations for plot, including erection of sheds and greenhouses, preventions of causing nuisance or annoyance to other plotholders. The agreement will also include prohibition of trade or business from the allotment, keeping of hens and rabbits and some instances bees
- The lease will also include the landlord's obligations to the tenants, which will include a right of exclusive possession where the tenants observe the agreement

The lease will include a termination clause (determination of tenancy) and outline events that may lead to a Notice to Quit under the terms of the agreement. Allotment sites vary so much in layout and facilities it is difficult to produce an agreement to suit all situations. The NAS draft has a schedule containing many clauses which can be used on a 'pick and mix' basis.

NAS also has a questionnaire for associations considering devolved management. This will help the group to consider in detail the obligations of taking on the running of the site. Many associations negotiate peppercorn rents, whereby they do not pay any rent to the allotment authority and are then able to use the money to run and maintain the site.

Public Liability Insurance (PLI) is an important aspect for a devolved managed group. All activities undertaken carry an element of risk and allotment sites are no exception. Without PLI an allotment association and individual members may be liable for claims made where someone is injured and the claimant can prove the negligence of the association. In many cases, Employers Liability Insurance should also be considered, as it may be possible that volunteers could be classed as employees. It is not the PAYE aspect that is considered, it is how much control there is over the way in which the work is carried out.



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ALLOTMENT TEAMWORK AT FAWLEY PARISH COUNCIL



Stephanie Bennett FSLCC, Parish Clerk to Fawley Parish Council in Hampshire, gives an in-depth look at how her team excels in managing the council's allotments.

This is us. Jason manages the Grounds and Maintenance Team which undertakes the outside work, Danni looks after all the tenancy, waiting list and finance matters - and Steph is the Clerk who gets in the way.



Our allotments are not the best and aren't enough. We have 28, which are quite small, sandwiched between two busy roads, adjacent to the oil refinery and on a landfill. Recent soil testing showed landfill at 0.6m - however, no hazardous materials were detected in the samples taken.

Would we put allotments there today? No way!

We are working up a new site, but before we tell you about that, do you recognise these issues?

Jason - grounds and maintenance

"As Steph has mentioned, the site is squished between two busy roads and what used to be a pitch and putt course but now a dog walking site. Plus, not only was the area created on landfill, but it is also located in a dip.

"Along the two roads we have very large pine trees which block sunlight, and the dropped needle and pinecones can be a real hindrance. Parts of the site also have a bad issue with deep rooted weeds.

"During the winter months, the site really struggles with drainage issues and the access track along with some of the plots can be submerged for weeks. Fencing is difficult to replace too due to the proximity of a busy road and multiple trees.

"Part of my role for the allotments is monthly inspections and organising the grounds team for general maintenance. This includes mowing, strimming and hedge cutting. We also repair the fencing, main access track and irrigation. It is never ending though, and we get a lot of complaints."

With Jason out on the ground, the time-consuming back office is run by Danni who communicates with people, sorts out complaints, deals with the waiting list - and even chases Jason to get eyes on the ground!

CONTINUED ON PAGE 14 >



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CONTINUED > ALLOTMENT TEAMWORK AT FAWLEY PARISH COUNCIL

Danni - administration

“My role within the allotments is encouraging tenants to comply with the terms of the tenancy agreement, maintaining the electronic records and issuing invoices. “We are doing our best to keep everyone happy on a site that’s clearly far from ideal. I have had tenants complaining the current site is too wet and unworkable. One tenant has even gone as far as to leave a small wooden boat in the centre of his plot after complaining several times about how wet it is. I admire his tenacity! But we are helpless in fixing this issue on the current site.

“Here are some of my top tips:

- Our allotment year runs from October to September. This gives us a good open space in our calendar that’s free from the fiscal year end to concentrate on making sure our records are up-to-date - plus we have plenty of time to raise invoices
- We run a Facebook page for our tenants where they can share ideas, plants and seeds and create a community where they can work together. It’s also a great platform for us to keep tenants up-to-date on any changes or news, and provide membership benefits from The National Allotment Society

“But then when it isn’t quite right, when we need a new approach, and people need to be told in no uncertain terms – it’s over to Steph.

The clerk bit

“Currently we have a huge waiting list and very poor quality allotments. We have identified suitable land for an additional site and have had soil samples taken – but after costing £3,500, this wasn’t cheap!

“Amazingly the site is adjacent to horse grazing so we are thinking about a mega manure scheme and there is already a water supply available on site. We are having to innovate though as it is going to take a lot of money to fence this area and get the access track and water supplies sorted. “A trust is being formed that will focus on improving wellbeing in the parish; the trustees include our 15 councillors – and Danni and I are the back office admin, i.e. the engine room. We are also being asked for disabled accessible allotments, and if we can pull this off, the allotments will be 50 metres from our recreation centre that we are putting a Changing Places into. The centre is open seven days a week until 10pm most nights. We are excited.”

So, we might pull this off!

The new thing cropping up now is tenanted garden space for people who have little or no private outside space. Somewhere they can make theirs with flowers, include a few seats and BBQ space. So, we’re keeping an eye on that.

But this little article wouldn’t be complete without an ‘allotmenteer’ perspective – so it’s at this point we turn back to Steph and Tony who have been allotmentees for years. Here are their top tips for clerks on how to support allotmentees:

The allotmenteer part

- “Some peeps have some novel ideas on how to grow veg. Provided it doesn’t impact on the neighbours then let them give it a go. It might look messy to those who want every weed annihilated, but we grow weeds in our carrots to prevent the deer scoffing the lot!
- Allotmentees are recyclers. Sheds, frames, pots...you name it. If something looks a bit rickety, give it a push-pull test like we do with headstones. Most likely the brand new polytunnel will rust through and blow away long before the patched-up wood and net cage that looks like it needs a telegram from the King
- Bees! We are beekeepers and we don’t keep bees on our allotment. Too many people banging and creating because its busy. So set your bee policy taking into account noise too
- Boundary markers and paths are an excellent way of keeping people in their plot - and for keeping those that stray in line
- Rats. Oh boy. If you allow chickens, be prepared for rats. When it comes to carpets, ensure you make it very clear they’re not allowed on site. And beware if you lift a carpet – there may well be a sizeable rat city underneath
- Organic or allow sprays? I would always allow spraying particularly on larger plots. Most people don’t have the time to weed everything by hand and when you get the bad stuff moving in you will need chemical as well as conventional warfare. I challenge anybody to show me how they dig out a mare’s tail and get it all.”

So, to end this missive it remains to say “happy allotment management” from the team at Fawley (currently scoffing Steph’s mooli, and first crop of raspberries and white currants).

SETTING UP AN ALLOTMENT SITE IN SWAVESEY FROM SCRATCH



Linda Miller PSLCC, Clerk to Swavesey Parish Council in Cambridgeshire, explains how they set up a new allotment site, which runs as a collaboration of a village charity (landowner), parish council (lessee) and allotment association (management).

In 2011 Swavesey, a village of approximately 2,600 residents, only had nine allotment plots on part of the non-conformist cemetery, with plots reducing as the cemetery took over. With allotments starting to come back into fashion, the waiting list was long. I had enquired a few years earlier and was jokingly informed “it would help to keep me busy when I retired” (I was in my late forties then, so it would have been a long wait)!

Local councils have a statutory duty to provide allotment plots if residents call on it to do so, providing there is land available.



Residents had approached me asking how to organise additional plots. I suggested writing to the parish council to ask if it would investigate. The council contacted our village lands charity, which owns agricultural land, as it did not own suitable land. Luckily, a large plot was due for tenancy renewal, from which a 2.5 acre section could conveniently be taken. The parish council agreed to take on a lease to turn it over to a community allotment site, the initial lease being ten years, which has since been renewed for 20 years.

The Hale Road allotment site has been hugely successful, with just over 60 plots, fully tenanted from the start, with a manageable waiting list of around 10-15 residents.

The site lies just outside of the village, along a drove, close to the RSPB nature reserve. It is a really tranquil spot, where we often see birds of prey overhead and have no main roads nearby. It is a joy to be there.

Site management

The National Society of Allotment and Leisure Gardens Ltd (NSALG) was a huge help. I received advice on the ways sites could be managed and we decided to set up a plot holders' allotment association to manage the site with the council just holding the lease.

All the parish council does is pay the annual lease fee to the charity, along with the water bill, which are both reimbursed by the allotment association.

Our site

- Full plots (22m x 5.7m 125sqm) or half plots 11m x 5.7m
- Sheds and polytunnels allowed on plots
- Perimeter rabbit/deer fenced
- Mains water via dipping troughs
- Onsite toilet
- Large car park

Set up and funding

From start to finish, it took about 18 months. A working group of parish councillors and residents took on planning and fundraising, which included visiting a lot of local allotment sites, to see what worked - and what didn't!

When it came to allocating plots, enquiries were invited, and at the September 2012 Council meeting, plots were allocated FA Cup fashion, by drawing numbers and names from two bags.

In early October tenants were invited to the village hall to sign their agreements, pay their first rent and visit their plot. These

2015 Awards for All funding secured for a waterless toilet (Woo Woo Kazubaloo KL2)



had already been marked out on the remains of the stubble field with each plot ploughed, so tenants had a good start.



Rabbit/deer fencing along perimeter - wide haul road

Special Feature Allotments

Hints and tips

- NSALG can help with advice and paperwork templates, such as tenancy agreements
- Perimeter fencing means no individual plot fencing, which has created a really social site
- Wide haul roads allow vehicle access for cutting perimeter hedges and delivering manure
- Pathways between plots provide all-round plot access and stop encroaching plot vegetation
- Large car park and entrance gate, mean no cars park in the drove and provide plenty of room for deliveries
- Cistern-filled dipping troughs mean no taps or hoses need to be left on
- Association fundraising helps to pay for extras, such as soil improver
- Good contacts with local farmers and horse owners provide free manure

Total cost in 2012 approx. £13,500:

£7,500	Lottery Awards for All Fund
£1,500	Cambridge News and Cambridge Water community funds
£500	South Cambs District Council Community Chest Fund
£4,000	Swavesey Parish Council

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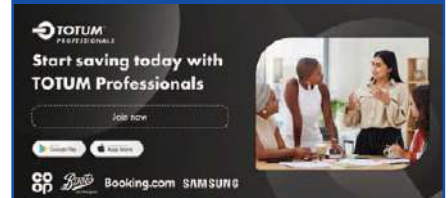
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ALLOTMENTS AND THE PLANNING SYSTEM



Andrew Towler, SLCC Planning Advisor, looks at planning matters associated with the provision of allotments by local councils, and some of the issues that sometimes can arise.

Before considering the provision of allotments, it is important to understand their position in the planning system.

This is set out in several planning acts and regulations, as well as in case law.

Planning law and regulations require that planning permission is only needed where development takes place.

It then sets several uses of land that, for the purposes of the planning system, does not involve the development of land. One of which is agriculture.

The use of land for allotments is treated as an agricultural use for planning purposes and, therefore, does not require planning permission. This was underlined in the High Court decision of *Crowborough Parish Council v Secretary of State for Environment* (1982) (the *Crowborough Case*) that held allotments can fall within the definition of 'Agriculture' for the purposes of the planning acts.

Also of relevance here is a planning appeal decision (APP/C3430/X/22/3297848)¹. In this case the local planning authority argued the intensity of the proposed allotment meant it could not be considered to be agriculture and was more akin to residential use. The Inspector concluded it was agriculture.

But this only deals with whether planning approval is required for the use of land as an allotment. It does not cover any associated structures, such as sheds, greenhouses, fences, hardstanding areas and access roads etc. This is a complicated area and with some uncertainty. The short answer is, generally they will not require planning approval if they are small and ancillary to the development.

Permitted development rights enable certain types of works to be undertaken without the need for planning approval.

Schedule 2 Part 12 of the Town and Country Planning Order (General Development Order)² 1995 enables a local authority (including a parish or community council) in England and Wales

to erect, 'any small ancillary building, works or equipment on land belonging to, or maintained by them required for the purposes of any function exercised by them on that land otherwise than as statutory undertakers'.

This power can, and has been, used by local councils to erect structures associated with an allotment site without the need to apply for planning permission. The key considerations here though are the extent to which the planned works are 'small' and 'ancillary'. These are subjective terms and local planning authorities are responsible for deciding in the first instance whether structures associated with allotments require planning approval or not. This means there are differences in interpretation between local planning authorities.

It should also be noted this permitted development right only extends to local authorities (including parish and community councils) and not to allotment holders.

There are other permitted development rights that extend to allotments, but these are arguably more general than Schedule 12 of the Town and Country Planning Order (General Development Order) 1995.

There are currently no specific permitted development rights for development by allotment holders and others. These other rights also mean that generally planning permission will not be required for small-scale development by allotment holders and others, such as the erection of a shed. Again, it is a matter for each local planning authority to determine in the first instance whether planning permission is required or not using these other permitted development rights.

Local councils may also consider allotment provision as part of a neighbourhood plan or similar document - and if a need exists, introduce policies in response to this. Such policies may include ones designating new sites, support their provision more generally or protecting from inappropriate development to existing ones.

¹ A copy of this Appeal Decision can be found by searching the Planning Inspectorate website – <https://acp.planninginspectorate.gov.uk>

² The Town and Country Planning (General Permitted Development) Order 1995 (legislation.gov.uk)

MISTLEY PARISH COUNCIL LAUNCHES NEW 'RIVER REACH' ALLOTMENT SITE



Three Mistley Parish Councillors give The Clerk Editor a tour of their new S.106 funded allotment site in Mistley, Essex.

It is a blustery and overcast day when I meet with Councillors Jenny Chaplin, Bev Burton and Stephen Coiley, three of four members of Mistley Parish Council's working group responsible for the council's allotment sites - their fourth member being Councillor Faye Kent. Judging by the humour and banter flowing between them it is clear they are a tight-knit group, although Stephen and Jenny maintain they do have their disagreements.

The trio have kindly agreed to meet with me to talk about their brand-new allotment site which opened on 1 April 2023 - not a random date as it ensures rental income falls in line with the financial year. The site, available to Mistley residents, is nestled within Hopkins Homes' new housing development 'River Reach' and was funded by the developer via an S.106 Legal Agreement secured through Tendring District Council's planning department. Stephen tells me the legal process of transferring the land from Hopkins Homes to the council and getting the site up and running was a long and arduous process. Through solicitors, not only did the size and exact location of the land to be transferred need to be agreed, but also what work the developer would carry out on the site before the land was legally signed over - this included the creation of a car park, fencing round the site, laying out of pitches, and installing water troughs.

The working group is not new to allotments - the parish council already have two other sites. When the working group was first established, to gain inspiration they visited a nearby allotment site owned by Capel St Mary Parish Council, managed through an allotment association. They tell me it's a well organised site, including buildings that hold produce so plot holders can swap crops, and essential allotment items bought in bulk (such as fertiliser), a shed where rotavators and lawnmowers are stored and

available for hire, and a wildlife walk. Judging by how well thought out the River Reach allotment site seems, the inspiration clearly worked, with 20 full sized plots divided into half plots and separated by perfectly aligned oak posts, including two plots situated by the entrance gate, both accessible and reserved for people with disabilities. Working group inspections are carried out monthly.

The council manages the allotment site on a not-for-profit basis, with all rental income fed back into the site, covering necessities such as a maintenance contractor and water rates. At the time of writing the annual rent for a plot is £100. Tenants have the right to erect sheds and polytunnels with the agreement of the council and water is provided free of charge. They are allowed to plant a small percentage of wildflowers should they wish to do so. Currently, there is no allotment committee, although tenants have been encouraged to establish one - to act as a spokesperson with the council, and to instil a strong sense of community.

Apart from the generously sized and dedicated allotment car park by the entrance, the site is fully fenced and gated, adding to a sense of security for both landlord and tenants. Stephen acknowledges he regrets not putting in a gate to the car park, not only for security, but the fact non-tenants also end up parking there, despite a clearly displayed sign stating it is for the use of allotment holders only.

As we part ways, I ask them to give me their top tips for any small parish council wishing to set up their own allotment site. Apart from Stephen's tongue-in-cheek 'don't do it' - the answer is an unanimous 'ensure you make the rules clear, have a meeting with your tenants to introduce yourself and them, and inform them that they should set up their own committee to organise themselves.'

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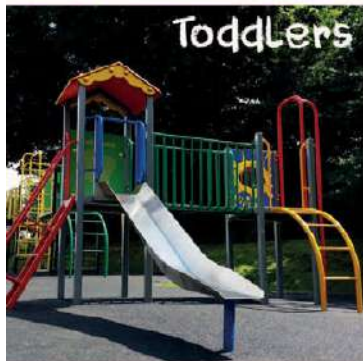


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ALLOTMENTS – WHY, WHY, WHY



Daniela Baylis, Parish Clerk to Boxley Parish Council in Kent, ponders allotment water usage, allotment paths, untended plots, plot envy and British versus German allotment sites.

Parish councils have them because we have to, and they are usually the bane of a clerk's life leading to many questions.

Why do so many councillors have allotments? Is this the reason they take up so much meeting time? Why is a style of shed so important? Does it really matter what colour it is? Is the objection to a plot holder having a greenhouse (in accordance with regulations) a genuine concern or just plot envy? Why do rabbits choose to live adjacent to the allotments? When did the price of water and its usage become so important?

I find these and many other issues come up time and time again at meetings and tend to take up more meeting time than any other issue.

Many non-plot holding councillors are under the belief they must make a profit on the allotments, and do not see it as a community provision. I have spent many hours trying to get this to work - only to receive a large bill for a leaking water pipe that blows any hope of making a profit out of the water.

One year, I had a chairman who decided plot holders with greenhouses or poly tunnels should pay an additional charge for water. When I pointed out every plot holder with a greenhouse collected water into water butts for the watering of their greenhouses and should actually pay less, I was told I was being difficult.

In the end every plot holder was charged an additional fee for water use, which was fairer but still led to many complaints from plot holders with water butts. Who'd have guessed that would happen?

At my current council we had a blank field purchased to create allotments. It was divided up into plots in neat squares with clearly defined paths. Ten years later, the paths are extremely wonky or missing where plot holders have joined several plots together or dug an extra bit of path into their plot. Over time, as plots have changed hands, the route the paths should take has become almost impossible to sort out, but I still get asked to fix it!

Another obsession I find is untended plots. This is usually blown out of all proportion. You write the not tended letter, the plot

holder comes and pulls a few weeds and then digs a bit over, but nothing really changes. Why keep it if you're not that interested in growing stuff?

The main obsession for all plot holders is the plot next door. Either they are doing everything wrong or not doing anything at all. Plot

envy is a real condition. The ultimate complaint received last week: "X came to the allotments last week under the influence of drink and then sat on his plot and opened a can of beer to drink".

"Did he make any comments that offended you, or approach you?"

"No, his plot is on the other side to mine, he didn't say anything to me, but I felt threatened by his being there so I left."

Quite what we were supposed to do in this instance is beyond me.

On a recent visit to Germany, I couldn't help but notice their allotment sites. Each one immaculate with beautiful gravel paths and identical sheds. Many sites had greenhouses as well as sheds, identical of course. Not a weed in site - just row after row of beautifully grown vegetables. It makes British allotments look very much like the poor relations.

Leading to the ultimate cry, why are my allotments not like this?



British allotment site



German allotment site

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NURTURING THE NATURE



Helen Watson FSLCC,
SLCC Senior Advisor &
Mentor Co-ordinator, discusses
physical and mental health benefits of
allotments, emphasising their importance as a council asset.



This edition of 'The Clerk' features allotments. Not all town, parish and community councils have the joy of managing allotments sites. However, for the clerks that do they will know the joys and sometimes challenges that allotment site management may bring. Some parish allotments are managed by allotment groups, whilst some stay in the management of the council.

Allotment origins date back to the Saxon times, from a basic need to grow and cultivate food to survive on. In the 19th century the Small Holding and Allotment Act 1908 came into force and allotments became a popular pastime, a place to go to 'Grow Your Own' whilst being with other members of the community. In the 1940s, allotments were used to grow and supply much needed fruit and vegetable during the 2nd World War when the supply of food was scarce. Allotment gardening has evolved and now plays an important part of our communities for food growing, health and wellbeing.

Allotments are like a growing tapestry within our many towns and parishes bringing nature, growing, the environment and communities together. Some allotment growers like an orderly mixture of raised beds, vegetables, fruit and flowers grown in neat lines with companion planting to discourage the harmful bugs whilst encouraging the best growth holistically within the soil structure. Whilst other allotment growers like a re-wilding theme, nurturing the nature within the plot they have been given to tend and grow. Either way, the fruit, vegetables, flowers still grow together bringing colour and life forward.

As the seasons turn, the jobs on the allotment change from winter and spring planting to the fruitful harvests in summer and early autumn. The composts need attention to be turned and enriched to fortify the soil to encourage new growth. The weeds need to be kept at bay, so they do not strangle and stifle the young fruit, veg and flowers planted. Careful selection of what type of planting location is needed to allow the plot holders to create the best allotment that they can. It takes a lot of care and time and commitment.

We look at the patchwork of allotments across the country and the diversity of people, skills, environmental care and nature they bring together with amazing results. There are community growing zones, RHS Bloom groups, schools and colleges, groups for people with health conditions and impairments, along with the traditional plot holders. There really is something to suit everyone from heavy digging to requiring strength and stamina to light weeding, seed cultivation and allotment design which can be done seated.

The physical and mental health benefits of allotment gardening are proven. Working the earth can improve mood, depression and anxiety, reduce stress levels, boost self-esteem and confidence. Physically, allotment gardening is a great active exercise, ranging from measured exercise with lighter to more strenuous activities. Allotment gardening can physically improve cardiovascular health, lung and breathing issues and strengthen bones. All this can lead to improved overall flexibility and health of the mind and greater wellbeing.

National Allotment Week is an annual celebration which takes place in August with a changing theme each year, the initiative in 2023 was centred on 'Soil Health'. The theme for 2024 will be based around 'Gardening with nature in mind'. Check out the National Allotment Society website nsalg.org.uk to find out more details. This is a great opportunity for your council to join the initiative to showcase your allotments, gardening with mindfulness, nurturing the nature, promoting care for all in its community.

Come sunshine or showers, allotments are a great place to be in the fresh air, in the community. Holistically and environmentally, allotments are a great and important asset to the council.

ALLOTMENTS OR BUST?



Andrew Maliphant, SLCC Environmental and Sustainability Advisor, champions environmental and community benefits of allotments.

There are 40 parish councils in the Forest of Dean, and at the general parish elections this May, only two held contested elections.

This is a pattern that seems to be repeated around the country. Do we think just carrying on our way of working as before will resolve this issue?

Okay, so what's YOUR idea, clever clogs?

Well, anything that makes more work for a clerk is not very appealing! We have already been saying we need to work more with our communities for a joint response to climate change, and maybe we can advise councillors to consider being more proactive with the powers we already have.

Our principal statutory duty dates from the Small Holdings and Allotments Act 1908:

“If the council of any borough, urban district, or parish are of the opinion that there is a demand for allotments in the parish, the council shall provide a sufficient number of allotments, and shall let such allotments to persons resident in the parish, and desiring to take the same”

Part II Clause 23 (1)

Rather than wait for the requirement to look for new allotments when six local electors write in, why not be more proactive when we consider the many community benefits:

- Cheaper and healthier home-grown food
- Better health from the exercise of working outdoors
- More community links by providing a common meeting ground for local people with a common interest
- Indirect environmental benefit by reducing 'food miles' by the family, local supermarkets and their suppliers

People are becoming increasingly concerned about the effects of climate change, and they may be more likely to join a parish or town council if they can see it is being proactive in response to local needs (and they can also run any new allotments through an allotments association!).

Good advice on how to choose and manage allotment sites is available from several sources, including the National Allotment



Photo courtesy Hulme Community Garden

Society (www.nsalg.org.uk), such as:

- Is the proposed site in a frost pocket or otherwise more exposed to the elements?
- How does the sun travel across the site?
- A water supply will be necessary, but is the site well drained?
- Soil structure is important, but it is best to use natural compost rather than peat-based or artificial products
- Some crops will grow better on some sites than others, but a rotation of crops will help to sustain the health and fertility of the soil
- Having beehives whose occupants increase local pollination can help sustain the quality of the natural world in a wider area than the allotments
- What about suitably sized greenhouses, or even keeping hens that lay eggs?

Not every parish or town council may feel there is suitable allotment land to lease or buy, but some may be donated by a developer, if asked? There are other similar options of course, such as setting up a community orchard (www.gov.uk/government/publications/community-orchards-a-how-to-guide) which is becoming popular. You could even take a lead from the Incredible Edible Network (www.incredibleedible.org.uk) and consider planting free food plants on all available public spaces.

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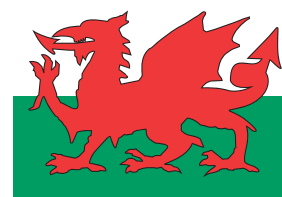
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SAVING LIVES – COLLABORATIVE WORKING BETWEEN ONE VOICE WALES AND NHS WALES



Phil J Hill, Senior Nurse and Community CPR and Defibrillator Manager at One Voice Wales, Resuscitation Council (UK) Advanced Life Support Instructor and Doctoral Researcher at Cardiff Metropolitan

University, and Jamie Sullivan, Advanced Intelligence Analyst at Save a Life Cymru, NHS Wales Health Collaborative (NHS Executive), provide a summary of their collaborative work with Welsh town and community councils on Out of Hospital Cardiac Arrest (OHCA) and defibrillation.

Introduction

Out of Hospital Cardiac Arrest (OHCA) is a common, high mortality life-threatening emergency. Most cases occur at home in front of loved ones.

Multiple causes include severe bleeding, choking, drowning and sepsis, but the most common is a ‘heart attack’. An unbroken chain of survival has repeatedly been cited as vital to enabling survival following collapse (Table 1). Those nearby must immediately initiate links 1-3, as survival-rates are said to fall as much as 12% for every 60 second delay in defibrillation. Training is not required as AEDs utilise voice-prompts with ambulance staff supporting throughout the 999 call. Public Access Defibrillator sites (PADs) have grown exponentially since 2010 but their usage is said to be as low as 5% (Mosesso et al 2009, RCUK and BHF 2013, Brooks et al 2022).

<p>Table 1</p>
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1: Recognise a OHCA is occurring and telephone 999 2: Early, continuous Cardiopulmonary Resuscitation (CPR) 3: Early defibrillation with an Automated External Defibrillator 4: Advanced Life Support to stabilize and transport the patient

Despite mobile phones, AED availability and ongoing awareness campaigns, survivorship does not seem to be improving. The UK survival rate is lower than 12% (in 60,000 patients per year) and is around

5% in Wales (Resuscitation Council UK RCUK and British Heart Foundation BHF 2013, RCUK 2021, Wnent et al 2022, Folke et al 2023, Save a Life Cymru SaLC 2023).

Background

One Voice Wales (OVW) is the principal organisation in Wales representing over 730 town and community councils. Multiple services offered to members includes representation, lobbying, training, green spaces advice and HR/Legal advice (OVW 2023). Save a Life Cymru (SaLC) is a quasi-governmental organisation established by Welsh Government (WG) to deliver the objectives laid out in the OHCA plan for Wales (WG 2017). SaLC established a partnership with OVW in 2021, resulting in the secondment of a senior nurse from a Health board. The secondment began in April 2022 and is scheduled to end in April 2024.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 29 >

Guide to Community Defibrillation 2023

Part 6/6 – Review of 2023

Cut out
and
keep

A lot was covered this year. So we thought a summary and reminder would help you plan into 2024. There is new technology coming and so for 2024 we will look at this in more detail. Until then, as some of the social media hype is being used to promote these 'new' technologies, we would advise not engaging until proper peer reviewed clinical data is available. This is a view shared by the Resuscitation Council too.



Part 1 – Telephone kiosks : BT has just released another 1000 kiosks for adoption. However, OfCom also installed new regulations about when and if a kiosk can be adopted and converted.. This included things like having access to all 4 major providers indoors in the whole of the community – something that is near on impossible. If you do wish to convert a kiosk, please do come and talk with us, after all, this was our idea originally, and we set the standards. We also give you free renovation paint.



Part 2 – Defibrillator signage : There are currently 13 different signage types being used in the UK to identify defibrillator placements. Only one is internationally recognised – ILCOR. This mix of signage types is causing confusion, both for visitors to the UK and when we go overseas. If these were road signs, imagine the chaos! The European Resuscitation council and ILCOR stated that *“When a victim collapses an AED must be obtained rapidly: simple and clear signage indicating the location of an AED and the fastest way to it is important. ILCOR has designed such an AED sign that may be recognised worldwide and this is recommended”*.



Part 3 – Choosing the right equipment : There are many different defibrillator types available in the UK. However your choice should take into account things like Equalities legislation, workflow, support and reliability. Don't be tempted by the offers of false 'grants' from some retailers. Cheap means cheap. In simple terms, the more you pay, the better the equipment. The same applies to cabinets.



Part 4 – How are defibrillators activated to an emergency : Understanding the ambulance service processes and what they are saying can prevent unnecessary use of a defibrillator. A defibrillator will only be advised if it is a CAT 1 life threatening situation. Unfortunately, many false activations are occurring, resulting in higher usage and higher support costs. A defibrillator can only be activated if it is maintained and reported as such.



Part 5 – Registration of defibrillators : Unless a defibrillator is registered with the ambulance services, it cannot be activated to a rescue. It cannot be activated unless it is maintained and reported back as such. WebNos is a governance system that helps you manage all aspects of your medical equipment and training; Circuit is a registration system for defibrillators. If on WebNos there is no need to re-register onto Circuit as this just causes duplications and problems.



In addition, we wrote an article on bleed kits in March. This highlighted the risks and processes of using bleed kits correctly, and the liabilities you will face if you place these in the community. *Bleed kits must never be placed in the same cabinets as a defibrillator.* Copies of all of these past articles are available from Community Heartbeat Trust.

When choosing a community defibrillator why not work with the experts rather than buying from the internet?



To fully comply with equality guidance, always use defibrillators with visual displays :



Do it right!

Always use the correct defibrillator signage.

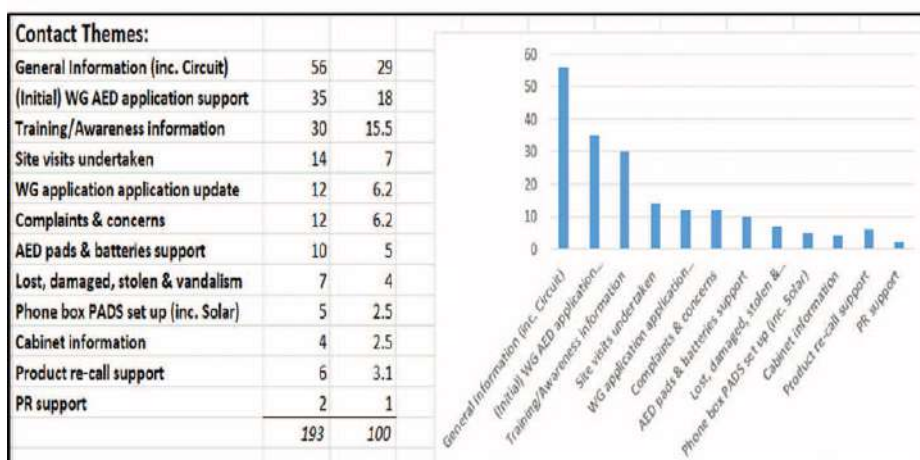


CONTINUED > SAVING LIVES – COLLABORATIVE WORKING BETWEEN ONE VOICE WALES AND NHS WALES

Work-streams

The main objective of this placement was for the senior nurse to act as a clinical lead for member councils. Following the OHCA plan this has centred around awareness, myth-busting, defibrillator maintenance and procurement. Publicising the role gave an opportunity to address any immediate enquires and clinical advice required. Apart from email and telephone support, there was introductory sessions via multiple (virtual) area committee meetings and a national conference. The first 6-month contacts were logged and arranged into themes (Table 2).

Table 2.



These were varied, including questions in relation to the National Defibrillator Network (NDN, BHF et al 2023), site visits and WG AED donation application support. In tandem, the development of a national CPR/AED community awareness programme was developed as a pilot within OVW councils and school teachers (25 sessions with 377 attendees). The submitted audit data gathered from these sessions are being statistically analysed ready for publication submission.

Further statistical analysis is being undertaken from the data elucidated from a OVW national Defib census. This was based upon the themes identified in the first six months and there was a 37.2% (272) return-rate. These councils are supporting the financial (consumable) requirements of 661 PADs (nearly 80% of those who responded to that question). From 528 respondents an overwhelming 99.9% of AEDs were available to the public (94% were available 24/7).

With the support of the OVW Policy adviser, the next undertaking will be the adaptation of a Welsh Health-board Community Defibrillator Policy (Hill 2023).

Conclusions

The deployment of a senior member of NHS Wales staff to an organisation such as OVW is a novel initiative. It has the potential for improving survival from OHCA within membership areas. Important work streams continue to be developed, statistically analysed and peer reviewed to widen the evidence base, demonstrating how OVW is collaborating with NHS Wales on this lifesaving public health initiative.

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Wednesday 4 December 2024

For more information and to book your place, visit www.slcc.co.uk/themed-summits/

EVENTS CALENDAR

November | December | January



Expand your knowledge with the SLCC Continuous Professional Development (CPD) Programme

You can find our complete range of webinars at: www.slcc.co.uk/events/webinar

WEBINAR	DATE
Microsoft Excel for Beginners – PC Users: Module 1	1 November
Powers & Duties	1 November
Getting into Health & Safety (3-Part Webinar)	2, 9 & 16 November
Project Management (3-Part Webinar)	2, 9 & 16 November
Quotes, Tenders & Contract Management (3-Part Webinar)	3, 10 & 17 November
Creating Accessible Word & PDF Documents: Getting the Basics Right	6 November
Agendas & Minutes (2-Part)	7 & 14 November
Practical Advice for Owner/Operations of Public Play Spaces	7 November
The Science of Kindness: Why Kindness is Good for You	13 November
Cultural Competence (2-Part)	13 & 20 November
Budgeting Basics	14 November 4 December
Managing Village Halls	15 November
Personal Management & Effectiveness for Women	15 November
Martyn's Law: Where are we now?	16 November
Introduction to Political Astuteness	17 November
Drop-in Session: Getting Qualified to Tackle the Climate Emergency	20 November
VAT: The Basics and Making VAT Digital	21 November 11 December 22 January
Allotment Management: Tenancy Agreements and Policies	21 November
The Council as a Landlord	21 November
Practical Compliance for CCTV by Parish, Town and Community Councils	23 November 29 January
WordPress Essentials for Beginners	23 & 30 November
Cemetery & Churchyard Safety and Memorialisation	27 November 19 January
Water Compliance and Legionella Control	27 November
Allotment Management: Site Facilities and Health and Safety	28 November



WEBINAR	DATE
How to use Graphic Design Software – Canva	28 November
Fully Showing Up: The Keys to Optimum Success	29 November
Interactive Self-Guided Tours for Villages, Towns and Parishes	4 December
Carbon Literacy Qualification	5 & 12 December
Microsoft Excel for Beginners – PC Users: Module 2	6 December
Disciplinary & Grievance Procedures	11 December
How to Give Feedback that Creates Change	12 December
What to do if you Consider a Bad/Unlawful Planning Decision has been Made	13 December
How to Bring Fresh Air to Toxic Situations	9 January
A Guide to the Appraisal Process	10 January
Creating a Strategic Vision for Shaping the Future	16 January
Managing Anxiety: Yes You Can!	17 January
Managing Closed Churchyards	18 January
Emotional Exhaustion and How to Avoid it	23 January
Menopause Awareness	23 January
Introduction to Understanding Quotes, Tenders and Contract Management	24 January
Cemetery Legal Compliance (2-Part)	24 & 25 January
People Management (2-Part)	26 & 9 February
How to use ChatGPT: Use AI to do Council Tasks Faster	30 January



RESIDENTIAL CONFERENCES

www.slcc.co.uk/practitioners

PRACTITIONERS' CONFERENCE 2024

31 JANUARY & 1 FEBRUARY

CHESFORD GRANGE HOTEL, KENILWORTH

NATIONAL CONFERENCE 2023 – INSPIRING PROFESSIONALS; EMPOWERING COUNCILS AND COMMUNITIES



Sharron Jones FSLCC, Clerk and RFO to Hawarden Community Council and Broughton and Bretton Community Council in Flintshire, recently attended SLCC's National Conference. Here she provides a summary of speaker presentations, workshops, exhibitor stands and networking opportunities.

Wow, the SLCC team, led by Helen Quick, Head of Conferences, Training and Education, have done it again. What a fabulous conference with plenty of learning, workshops, opportunities for questions, networking and great presentations.

This conference is one of the major conferences and provides clerks and other officers the chance to meet up and share ideas or be a shoulder to cry on – literally! The session delivered by Beckie Whitehouse on 'Finding calm, conquering anxiety and cultivating inner peace' was of particular benefit.

The conference was held at the Leonardo Hotel, Hinckley Island in Leicester. There were 177 delegates, (including 40 first time attendees), 33 virtual attendees, and 75 exhibitor representatives over 36 stands. I always go to conference armed with a list of questions to ask exhibitors and this year's list included PSTAX (VAT queries and new build), BHIB Insurance (competitive prices and response times), CCLA (council investments), Blachere Illumination (Christmas and other lighting), various play providers, Cloudy IT (IT solutions), Microshade (hosted service and telecoms) and Rialtas (financial software) to name but a few.

The conference compere, Becky Walsh, inspirational speaker, was, as always, fabulous and funny. We saw the past president, Linda Carter FSLCC, formally handing over her chain of office to Malcolm Nicholson PSLCC for the 2023-24 presidential year. Linda had managed to raise a substantial amount of money for her two charities by various methods, including a sponsored wing walk! Well done Linda. The total amount raised was £2,279 and Linda's two charities were Centrepont and the SLCC Education Fund.

The conference started with a moving presentation entitled 'From tragedy to legislative change' by Figen Murray OBE. Figen is the mother of Martyn Hett, who at 29 years of age was tragically killed alongside 21 others at the Manchester Arena terrorist attack in May 2017. Since the attack, Figen has been campaigning for legislative change to enhance security at public events and is the force behind 'Martyn's Law' (Protect Duty). She was incredibly inspiring despite what she has been through and outlined her moving story of that tragic time with some elements of humour. The room could sense the tragedy and the loss but was also moved by Figen's dedication and spirit. Nearly six years later, the Draft Terrorism (Protection of Premises) Bill has been published based on a tiered system but Figen continues to campaign for this bill to be passed as legislation.

Further detailed presentations included 'Local Councils and their uneasy relationship with planning system', 'Get your council heard nationally', 'Parish councils: the future of the sector' and a presentation on 'The vital role of local councils working with other partners to reduce violence' and how community, parish and town councils can become involved with local community safety partnerships to make a difference. There were many more.

During the conference Rob Smith, SLCC Chief Executive, announced a new and very special award. The Pauline Whitehead Perseverance Award 2023. Sadly Pauline, a clerk and SLCC Community Governance Tutor lost her battle with cancer earlier this year. Rob said that she was kind, caring and thoughtful, a sentiment echoed by everyone who knew her. Her husband attended the conference to present this prestigious award and although extremely tearful, his love and admiration for



CPD, Training, and Events
National conference

Pauline shone through. This was particularly special to me and very poignant as my beautiful friend Celia Price PSLCC won the award for her “ongoing determination and perseverance whilst overcoming day to day challenges”. A truly well-deserved award, well done Celia.

The conference dinner also included an awards ceremony recognising many clerks in the profession for volunteering, projects, branch membership etc. Johnathan Bourne FSLCC, had been made an Honorary Vice President, recognising his amazing commitment to the sector as a clerk, as a mentor, as a Community Governance course leader and many more achievements. Another special award was made to Mark Galbraith, SLCC Wales Policy Liaison Officer who had retired from this position. It was extremely rewarding to see Mark recognised for his commitment and service – well done Mark. Alfie Moore provided entertainment at the dinner and was truly awesome! Alfie is a BBC Radio 4 presenter and comedy writer with his distinctive niche as a recently retired Police Officer. A full list of award winners can be found on page 36.

Day two started with a presentation from Donna Smith, Town Clerk and Proper Officer and Marcus Prouse, Deputy Town Clerk and Office Manager, who on the 1 April 2023, ‘gave birth’ to a brand new town council to serve the county town of Taunton. Weighing in at a rather healthy two million pounds, this ‘newborn’ would become a leading council within the sector. Donna and Marcus presented us with their journey and lessons learned and likened it to the birth of a newborn, outlining the support and role of SLCC and Local Council Consultancy (LCC). Thoroughly inspiring!

It was lovely to see our international colleagues from the International Institute of Municipal Clerks (IIMC) from America and the Netherlands attending the conference. Anne Jett from the Dutch Ministry of the Interior and Kingdom Relations provided an informative presentation on ‘The Dutch Approach for More Resilience and Respect in Politics’ on day two.

The conference ended with such an inspirational speaker, Tilly Lockey. Tilly is a multi-talented hardworking inspiration at a mere age of 18. At an early age she overcame her own battle with meningitis and lost both of her hands. She told us about her life growing up with prosthetic arms which looked natural, skin coloured and had painted nails but she couldn’t do many of the things she wanted to. Working as a social media influencer, model, and singer she has assisted with the development of state-of-the-art bionic arms with Open Bionics which she wears every day. She has received humanitarian awards in New York and recently won a talent competition, performing to an audience of 20,000 at BBC Radio 1’s Big Weekend. Tilly allowed the audience to look at one of her bionic arms whilst speaking and explained how it worked and how she was able to change her grip to pick up anything from a mug and a hairbrush to the finer fingertip pick up. She was awesome!

National Conference 2023
was generously sponsored by:





2023 SLCC AWARDS WINNERS



★ Long Service Award:

Sue Templeman, Ackworth Parish Council, Roger Greenwood, Heptonstall Parish Council, and Rodney Duggua, Chichester City Council

★ New Clerk of the Year Award:

Ross Willmott, Mountsorrel Parish Council

★ Best Magazine Article Award:

Matthew Gleadell, Newark Town Council

★ Bryan Metcalf Award for Volunteering:

Gina Lopes PSLCC, Easton Parish Council

★ Best Case Study at a Residential or Training Event:

Helen Ball FSLCC, Shrewsbury Town Council

★ Myrna Liles Cup Award for Branch Membership Growth:

West Wales Branch

★ John Crompton Cup for Mentoring:

Claire Commons FSLCC, Shepton Mallet Town Council

★ Outstanding Contribution Award:

Mark Galbraith, Llanelli Rural Community Council and SLCC Wales Policy Liaison Officer

★ Chief Executive's Staff Award:

Wayne German, SLCC Sales and Marketing Assistant

★ Certificate in Local Council Administration (CILCA) Exemplary Award:

Sarah Edmunds, Goring on Thames Parish Council, Stephanie Kirby, Prudhoe Town Council, Ann Lyon, Dursley Town Council, and Stephen Smith PSLCC, Wool Parish Council

★ Honorary Vice President Award:

Johnathan Bourne FSLCC, SLCC Senior Support Tutor

★ Pauline Whitehead Perseverance Award:



Celia Price PSLCC, Lancing Parish Council

We are proud to announce the inaugural Pauline Whitehead Perseverance Award, an initiative that first originated from the hearts of her students—a fitting tribute to a remarkable

Community Governance tutor who touched so many lives. Here at the SLCC, we are honoured to help bring this vision to fruition and ensure its continuation for future cohorts of students.

Pauline was not just a tutor; she was a beacon of passion, dedication, and kindness. Her encyclopaedic knowledge of the subject matter was only rivalled by her unwavering commitment to her students' success. But what set Pauline apart was her sense of humour—her ability to make even the most complex discussions engaging and enjoyable.

The award will be given annually to a student who has displayed perseverance and resilience, embodying the very traits that made Pauline so unforgettable. It is not merely a celebration of academic achievement, but a recognition of the human spirit, determination, and the will to overcome challenges—qualities that Pauline admired and exemplified throughout her teaching journey.

The inaugural award was presented by Simon Whitehead, Pauline's husband, to Celia Price PSLCC, Clerk to Lancing Parish Council, at the National Conference in October 2023. Celia was honoured and humbled to receive the award and said *"I have said it so many times but I cannot stress enough the influence Pauline has on me and my career. There is no way I could be a tutor but I am planning on being a mentor for new clerks, then maybe ... one day!"*

Celia's journey, filled with unwavering commitment despite numerous setbacks, exemplifies the very essence of this award. She didn't just overcome obstacles; she transformed them into stepping stones, using each experience as a lesson, and each setback as motivation. It's this extraordinary spirit of resilience and perseverance that makes Celia the embodiment of what Pauline stood for.

Celia, congratulations on being the inaugural recipient of the Pauline Whitehead Perseverance Award! Your journey is a beacon of inspiration for us all, reminding us that with dedication, resilience, and the right support, there is no obstacle too great to overcome.

Further details of our 2023 SLCC Award winners can be found on pages 68 and 69 in The Clerk digital version.

BRANCH BRIEFING



Naomi Bibi FSLCC, SLCC Head of Member Services, shares updates from branches.

Surrey Branch

The SLCC Surrey Branch held their AGM this year in the Garden Room at Snowhill Garden Centre in Felbridge. CCLA gave an update on their financial products. A wide range of topics were discussed at the meeting including Rule 6 Party attendance at planning appeals, community fund applications, year-end procedures and Strategic CIL success.



The branch said a fond farewell to Anne Bott, Chief Executive Officer of the Surrey Association of Local Councils. Anne was thanked for her many years of support to town and parish councils, and great relationship with the Surrey branch. She was presented with a rose called 'Princess Anne'.

Beverley Bell FSLCC, Surrey Branch Secretary

Buckinghamshire and Milton Keynes Branch

Buckinghamshire and Milton Keynes Branch members were delighted to host a visit from SLCC President Linda Carter.



Linda, who attended the meeting at Waddesdon Community Centre on 17 July, shared information regarding her role. Linda had, at that time, undertaken 40 days of presidential duties, including attending six conferences and 14 branch visits.

Linda is well known to our branch having lived and worked in our county and around its borders during her clerking career. Many of us have benefitted from informal support and advice over the years before she became president. It was great to hear Linda has not lost her enthusiasm for supporting and developing our profession.

Well done Linda, from Bucks and Milton Keynes members, for all of your hard work on behalf of SLCC.

Helen Hupton, SLCC Buckinghamshire and Milton Keynes Secretary

Norfolk Branch

On 7 July, SLCC Norfolk held their Annual Conference. Clerks and councillors from across Norfolk and beyond joined together at Norwich City Football Club, Carrow Road, Norwich. Delegates were welcomed by Gina Lopes, Branch Chair, who invited SLCC President, Linda Carter, to address the conference. We were honoured to have Linda with us, who inspired us with her 'wing walk' plans, raising funds for Centrepoint and SLCC's Educational Trust.



The programme was varied with speakers delivering a range of topics from rewilding and green care to youth engagement. There was lots of interest and time to ask questions after each session.

We were lucky enough to have a sunny day and spilled out on to the terrace overlooking the perfectly mown pitch during breaks. As well as enjoying culinary delights of Delia's Kitchen, attendees networked with colleagues. Exhibitors were also on hand to answer queries and demonstrate products.

Overall feedback confirmed attendees considered the conference as excellent/good - however, we are interested to hear what members would like in the future, so please let us know.

Thanks to Linda Carter, our speakers and exhibitors, SLCC Norfolk Executive Committee members, and Carrow Road staff. Special thanks too to Alan Fairchild, MBE, who acted as compere.

Gina Lopes PSLCC, SLCC Norfolk Branch Chair

CONTINUED ON PAGE 39 >



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CONTINUED > BRANCH BRIEFING

Essex Branch

Summer certainly arrived for our annual training day and AGM on 7 June. A glorious day saw some 37 clerks together again, after such a long time looking at each other on screens.



SLCC President, Linda Carter, attended and spoke of her experience with parish councils, ‘championing’ young people, often innovative in their approach to projects and ideas.

Information and guidance were also given by Ed Gemmel, parish councillor, about climate change. He leads his own parish council’s climate change emergency committee.

Roger Taylor presented a legal update, speaking about the new edition of CAB, the 2023 version of the The Clerks’ Manual, charities and separation of duties, and other legal information. Presentations were made by two of our sponsors, CloudyIT and CCLA. Suzanne Walker gave an overview of project management and things to consider when embarking on a new council project, and Liz Petyt-Start concluded with a workshop-style session on HR matters.

We have a new Chair, Suzanne Walker, Secretary, Sara Gaeta, and branch representatives. Thanks go to clerks who volunteered to take up executive committee roles, and to those who did not seek re-election.

Finally, huge thanks go to Maria Dyer and Georgina Bassett, who organise the training day - this takes an exceptional amount of hard work and they do ‘a grand job’.

Barbara Larken, Essex Branch Press Officer

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The legal practice with the personal touch

YOUR PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT IS IMPORTANT – IT MATTERS!



Lesley Swinbank FSLCC, SLCC Professional Development Officer talks to two current student members about their professional development.

Did you know that all members of SLCC are now eligible to join the Professional Development Scheme (PDS)?

The new Student (StSLCC) level was introduced last year and is open to all. It joins the higher levels of Principal (PSLCC) and Fellow (FSLCC). All you need are 12 Continuous Professional Development (CPD) points – easily acquired as shown, and logged within your own CPD record which you can access from the SLCC website.

Joining as a StSLCC is a first step in your career development and you can progress through the PDS levels as you gain CiLCA or a Community Governance qualification.

Student membership also gives you all the benefits of being a PDS member, including:

- Use of the designated letters 'StSLCC' after your name, which will also be published on the SLCC website during your membership to confirm your status
- Receipt of a £10 training voucher to use against any SLCC CPD course or training event within the first year of your membership, and also a training voucher each year at membership confirmation
- Use of the designated student logo on your CV and job applications
- Receipt of a student member pin badge to wear at events and training
- Three Professional Development bulletins offering the latest training news and advice on gaining CPD points, along with professional development support

How to acquire your 12 CPD points

Reading The Clerk over the year	3 points
Reading other relevant documents	3 points
Attending webinars/branch events	1 point/2 hours
Training (planning, standards etc)	1 point/2 hours
Conferences	7.5 points
ILCA	8 points

All SLCC training/webinars and conferences show the number of CPD points for attending.

Don't take my word for this – read what two new StSLCC members say!



Sally McLellan FSLCC

Your Council: Clerk to Wellingborough Town

Council (since it was created in April 2021) Pre-2021 - Wolverton and Greenleys Town Council, in Milton Keynes for 13 years

Population: 46,000

Precept: £335,095



Michaela Chaplin StSLCC

Your Council: Clerk to Dyffryn Clydach

Community Council since June 2023. Assistant Clerk to Blaenhonddan Community Council since November 2021.

Population and precept:

Blaenhonddan Community Council population is around 11,000, with a precept of £221,000.

Dyffryn Clydach Community Council population is around 3,300, with a precept of £61,465.

Cost

Student membership costs just £15 per year – and you then receive your £10 training voucher each year – so in effect it's just £5!

How do I become a StSLCC?

Applying for membership is easy. You can apply online by upgrading/ buying a new membership from your account on the SLCC website.

What are your thoughts on professional development?

Sally McLellan

As a clerk you never stop learning! New legislation comes in and old ones get updated. A skilled clerk is vital to guide the council through challenges, providing professional, unbiased advice. Logging CPD to demonstrate sector skills is a great selling point as a clerk. Clerks don't tend to promote themselves and their knowledge - the PDS does this for us through our membership.

Michaela Chaplin

Professional development allows me to improve skills, knowledge and performance as a clerk and assistant clerk. As an SLCC student I have access to information and advice from knowledgeable people helping me professionally, along with a variety of webinars and forum where I can ask clerks for ideas.

What are the benefits to both you and your council?

Sally McLellan

As clerks we must continuously develop our skills. Identifying professional development needs and embarking on training is important. This benefits the council as it has a skilled clerk to provide advice, and you as a professional as an esteemed sector member. Training is a great way to meet new people. Sharing experience and good practice is priceless! I am fortunate my previous council was invested in having a trained clerk. I started CiLCA within a month of joining, and went on to do 'Working with my Council', Community Governance course level 4 and 5, and many others. This investment paid off as I stayed with them for 13 years, continuously learning as the council expanded its range of community services. A low staff turnover enables the council to be more productive.

Michaela Chaplin

Having a clerk/assistant clerk who has undertaken training and continues professional development allows a council to have the knowledge they are keeping up-to-date in a regularly changing sector. Professional development gives me confidence I am giving the best and most up to date advice.

Did your council fund any qualifications/courses etc?

Sally McLellan

My current council has a training budget and supports me attending the training and conferences I need to perform my role.

Michaela Chaplin

Blaenhonddan Community Council funded ILCA to CiLCA. I received a grant via SLCC from the Welsh Government for CiLCA. Other webinars I tend to fund myself as they're for me to develop my own knowledge and understanding, allowing me to feel more confident.

How do you log your own CPD?

Sally McLellan

I log training attended on a spreadsheet held on my council's personnel records. I tend to log into my SLCC CPD quarterly, or when I have attended training. I log all literature read and training attended.

Michaela Chaplin

I log CPD using SLCC's online CPD and Professional Development Plan. If the event, webinar or training I attend is through SLCC, it automatically gets logged. Adding other CPD is easy.

Any other comments about the CPD/PDS scheme?

Sally McLellan

My tip is give Lesley a call if you're thinking of joining and not sure what membership you can apply for. She is a wealth of knowledge and nothing is too much trouble.

Michaela Chaplin

I found using the plan easy. It allowed me to realise what training I had already completed, and gave me the chance to think about areas to improve. My advice is look on the CPD log to see what you have completed, then fill in the PDP with areas you want to develop. Keep updating it as things change, or you realise there is weakness in your knowledge. Print it off and ask the council to look at it so they understand how hard you're working ensuring they have the best advice - and so they continue to support your professional development.



Further information on all aspects of professional development can be found at www.slcc.co.uk/develop or by contacting Lesley Swinbank, SLCC Professional Development Officer, at lesley.swinbank@slcc.co.uk / develop@slcc.co.uk

THE MASTERS: THE NEXT CHALLENGE?



Sally Thurston BA Hons FSLCC, SLCC Module Tutor and Elisabeth Skinner MBE FSLCC, SLCC Senior Support Tutor, provide an update on the eagerly awaited MA in Public Leadership and Management.

The Master of Arts in Public Leadership & Management, designed specifically with the local council sector in mind, made a great start at De Montfort University (DMU) but struggled in the second year when key staff left the university. Despite these issues, ten colleagues graduated with their Master of Arts degrees on September 12 2023.

Congratulations to Stephanie Bennett FSLCC, Annie Child PSLCC (Affiliate), Jennifer Childs FSLCC, Emma Coleman PSLCC, Mark Hassall, Kelly Holland, Julie Larter FSLCC, Ian Morris FSLCC, Julie Shirley PSLCC and Sally Thurston FSLCC who showed the determination and resilience that we see day in day out in local councils.



From left to right is Julie Larter FSLCC, Emma Coleman PSLCC, Sally Thurston FSLCC and Mark Hassall

The new graduates saw massive benefits from the course and felt it was an exciting networking opportunity that facilitates new ways of thinking. They have told us that they found the MA was vitally important for increasing knowledge, understanding and professionalism. It broadened horizons and by exploring topics in depth, they

generated greater confidence in planning for the future. SLCC believes this level of study should be available for our profession.

DMU are so impressed with the way SLCC manages the Community Governance courses at Levels 4, 5 and 6 that they have agreed, and encouraged us, to apply to deliver the Masters. Like the clerks we represent, SLCC is always up for a challenge and this one is huge – and massively exciting.

The MA is designed to prepare individuals (and therefore the organisations that you represent) for leadership in our challenging public sector climate. Students have opportunities to reflect critically on contemporary issues affecting our sector while your studies help you to manage change, always working with your local communities. You are encouraged to collaborate on innovative projects, design and improve public services and create forward-looking policies. The course gives you the time and space to consider your own leadership style and the challenges of moving in and across the complex landscape within which you work.

The MA in Public Leadership involves two years of part-time study. Although the course is officially distance learning, there will be a one-day in person event at the start of every module (three in the first year), a programme of online tutorials, packages of course materials, pointers to a wealth of reading and support from tutors.

There are five modules studied consecutively with the first four modules each taking three or four months and the final module (a double) taking up to eight months. The modules are shown below, in order of study, and will be delivered by both an academic and a practitioner:

- Leading Change
- Empowering Communities
- Collaborative Innovation
- Designing Public Services
- Policy into Practice

Angie Hurren BEM FSLCC is the programme leader for all courses from Level 4 to Level 7 but Sally Thurston FSLCC, recent graduate of the first DMU cohort and Town Clerk of Faringdon Town Council in Oxfordshire, is to be the senior tutor for the Masters. Sally will lead a teaching team that includes academics, Community Governance tutors and graduates of the original MA.

We need to go through a process where the university examines and validates our proposals, thus ensuring the project is built on a strong foundation. We are aiming for validation in November 2023 with a start date for the first SLCC cohort in April 2024.

We hope for at least eight students. If you already have a degree (either in Community Governance or in another related subject), how can you resist taking that next step and becoming one of them?

For more information visit www.slcc.co.uk/community-governance or email qualifications@slcc.co.uk

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Highlighting speakers and their sessions

How to use ChatGPT. Use AI to do council tasks faster, Becky Walsh

You might have heard about ChatGPT and thought it sounds scary and isn't for you. The truth is this new technology is here to stay and can be a very useful tool. The chatbot AI can do a surprising amount of tasks, and Becky Walsh has been exploring what it can do for the kinds of tasks we do as councils. Don't worry, it's not about taking away your job, but it could make your working day a whole lot easier. In this talk, you'll learn how to use it and what it can be used for.

Nothing Ventured, Nothing Gained – how to make a compelling business case, Michael King

Developing a business case is an important step in the process of seeking funding for any 'business', project or venture managed by the council. A well-structured business case will demonstrate the project's viability and potential success. It will also help you to clarify what you want to do and how you want to do it. A well-structured business case can demonstrate to funders that your project has a strong foundation, a clear path to success, and the potential to deliver benefits. This can help increase your chances of securing funding and support for your council. Whatever the scale, there are some basic stages to developing business cases that can help you access funding: Define your business idea and goals; conduct market research; develop a financial model; and present a clear and compelling argument. This session will explore these stages, look at a basic template to present any business case, how to scale that with your project and how to manage expectations of what can be done and what will be done.

Retaining volunteers in the 21st century, Rob Jackson

Volunteering is changing and old models of how to keep people engaged are becoming outdated. We will explore some of these changes, examine the problem with traditional retention approaches and provide top tips for how you can change and become better at keeping volunteer support.

Feedback from the 2023 delegates

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NEW COUNCIL FOR CHELMSFORD GARDEN COMMUNITY



Suzanne Walker PSLCC, Executive Officer and RFO to Chelmsford Garden Community Council in Essex, discusses the process behind setting up a new council.

Sometimes big changes come about when you least expect them, and you find out that new challenges can result in exciting and innovative ways of doing things to achieve a lot for your community.

The big change in my life this year has been moving from a medium sized traditional parish council to a brand new council set up following a Community Governance Review by Chelmsford City Council.

The new council, the Chelmsford Garden Community Council, encompasses a new development bringing together existing and new neighbourhoods in Chelmsford, Essex formerly part of four other parishes. There are currently around 2,100 homes within the garden community which will grow to 10,000 homes when completed adding four new villages, including homes, businesses, leisure and community facilities, schools, and a railway station.

Initially, Chelmsford City Council set up a shadow council comprising councillors from parish councils in the area, members of local community groups and city councillors and gave them three priorities – to set up a website and IT system, to agree a strategy upon which to base precept demand, and to appoint a clerk.

When I attended interview, it was clear that the main impetus of the new council would be to work hard with stakeholders and residents to establish a real community rather than the area being just another housing estate. I was excited by the challenge of coming into a council from inception and working with councillors to engage with residents in building the new community, so was pleased to accept the role of clerk and RFO for the council which came into being on 1 April 2023.

The first challenges leading up to the council becoming legally established were to set up a bank account, arrange insurance and have an external payroll provider ready to go! It was vital that on 1 April the council would be ready and there was a lot of work in setting up those basics. The shadow council had set up an email and IT system (having a good IT system is vital) which was a great help. It had been recognised that some expenditure would be required prior to the precept being paid so a loan was agreed with Chelmsford City Council so the moment the council came into being certain expenditure could be paid and the bank account could be opened. The loan was repaid upon precept payment at the end of April.



The first meeting was ‘governance heavy’ with policies put in place, my appointment formally agreed, and other issues such as the proper council name, the fact it is a statutory consultee for planning matters agreed, and various payments and contracts.

The next challenge was to attract councillors to stand for election on 4 May 2023 in the four wards. The election was publicised on social media, locally and with community stakeholders. The North ward was contested but spaces remained for the South and South-East ward and a by-election was called. Efforts were made in the community to attract residents to stand for co-option. The May annual parish meeting included an informal ‘meet and greet’ session with elected councillors and as a result, it was pleasing when several people came forward to both stand for the East ward and to stand for co-option, resulting in the full complement of 13 councillors now in place! The council has a real diversity of members with an equal split between women and men and differing ethnic backgrounds, representing the diversity in the community.

At subsequent meetings committees have been set up. The communications committee is working hard to make sure every effort is made to seek views of residents to inform the council’s workings. A stakeholder agreement is being worked on to establish working relationships with other stakeholders,

including management companies, voluntary groups and developers.

Other challenges have included taking over a lease for a community centre from another council and working with the Police and becoming involved in the Special Constable scheme.

Most of the councillors have no previous local government involvement, so as the Executive Officer, I have seen it as vital to guide them through the maze of legal requirements in an approachable way and finding training for them with help from our County Association. Although I have worked hard to introduce policies and procedures, I have been mindful of not overwhelming the new councillors whilst making sure proper practices are in place.

So far as hints and tips for other clerks in a similar position are concerned, I would say the following matters are vital:

1. Have a good working relationship with your District/City/Unitary authority – ideally they will set up a properly resourced shadow council to assist in the new council setup and offer support in the process
2. Be organised – I live by Excel spreadsheets covering various workstreams required in the initial set up and ongoing workload
3. Be pro-active in learning about the community and local groups and stakeholders, which is vital in forming new networks and contacts
4. Be willing to communicate more than usual with your councillors, to provide guidance and form good working relationships from the start
5. Make sure councillors have a clear strategy regarding the council's ethos and aims so the council can demonstrate a clear benefit to residents in having this new layer of governance
6. Don't 'reinvent the wheel', look at draft policies and guidance on SLCC's website to help with required documentation

The council is still very new and finding its feet, but I am pleased to be working with councillors who are passionate about community and willing to work collaboratively with me.



South Ayrshire increase recycling rates in parks

South Ayrshire Council is collecting 36.8%* more recyclable waste in residential parks since installing over 400 Maxi recycling bins by Leaffield Environmental in June 2022.

Paul Dougall, Coordinator of Neighbourhood Services at South Ayrshire Council commented on their new recycling on-the-go scheme:

"We selected Leaffield Environmental because we liked the flexibility of changing the recycling labels and aperture colours to collect different waste streams in line with our household bin collections.

We also liked that the bins featured a tilted sack retention frame so we could easily see any contaminated waste through the transparent bin bags, rather than having a steel or plastic liner inside the bin."

*Data obtained by Zero Waste Scotland Report on data for the period of June to September 2022.












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PROCUREMENT AND TENDERING NEEDN'T CAUSE HEADACHES!



Janine Gardner, Local Council Consultancy (LCC) Associate, provides advice on how LCC can assist councils with

procurement and tender processes.

One of the many services offered by SLCC's Local Council Consultancy (LCC) is support with councils' procurement and tender requirements.

Ever wondered whether to obtain a minimum of three quotes or to carry out a public procurement exercise? Or to opt for an open or a restricted procedure? Use the government's Contracts Finder or Find a Tender service?

Procurement and tender processes can be lengthy and mind-boggling – bearing in mind the many requirements set out by model standing orders, model financial regulations and The Public Contracts Regulations 2015. Many councils still operate their pre-Brexit standing orders and financial regulations, which include tender thresholds defined by the European Union rather than the UK Government.

Whether you are looking to install a new piece of play equipment or delivering an entire new play area, skatepark, trim trail or outdoor gym, whether you are planning physical improvements to a community hall or sports pavilion or you are constructing an entire new building, whether you are seeking to award a new support contract – perhaps covering grounds maintenance or IT support or payroll – LCC is able to help with a support package to suit each individual council, ranging from guidance and advice for councils to carry out the exercises themselves to delivering an entire service from beginning to end:

- Advising on procurement and tender requirements
- Devising and/or providing training, such as workshops, for councillors and council employees
- Developing matrixes to assist tender evaluation panels to ensure they're in accordance with the invitation to tender documents

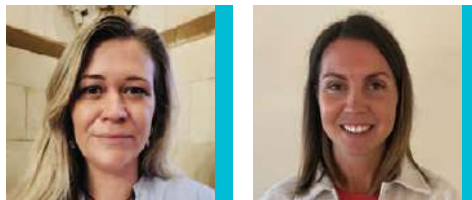
- Preparing procurement documentation, including invitation to tender documents, the conditions under which a procurement exercise will be carried out and tender submission forms
- Developing weighted tender evaluation criteria
- Publishing invitations to tender and all relevant information and documentation, such as descriptions of provisions, specifications, planning restrictions, surveys, condition reports and plans
- Managing correspondence and prospective bidders' questions and answers, including publishing those on the most appropriate platform(s) and issuing notifications to shortlisted bidders
- Either assisting with or actively assessing and scoring tender returns
- Issuing invitations to presentation and facilitating presentations by shortlisted tenderers, either in-person or virtually
- Devising procurement templates for councils' future independent use

When carrying out procurement exercises, it can be helpful to ask higher-tier authorities and other partner organisations for advice and guidance. But often their procurement procedures and templates are not quite right for procurement exercises in the local council sector and appear unnecessarily complicated for the often less-complex procurement exercises in the first tier of local government.

Our associates are experienced in thinking creatively to simplify procedures so they work for individual local councils much better, taking into account each council's situation and circumstances.

If you do have any procurement and tender requirements and are interested in having an informal and no-obligation conversation with LCC, please contact Angela Meek, LCC Officer, by emailing consultancy@slcc.co.uk or calling 01823 793 215.

PARTNERSHIP WORK IMPROVES ST KATHERINE'S GARDENS



Josephine Haines and Louise Hannam-Jones, Events and Project Officers at Northampton Town Council in Northamptonshire, report on working with local volunteers and organisations to make St Katherine's Gardens a local go-to spot within the town centre.

Northampton Town Council and Northampton Town Centre Business Improvement District (BID) were joined by volunteers from the town council's Climate Change Forum, The Royal British Legion and local businesses to improve St Katherine's Gardens as part of the Coronation Big Help Out campaign on 8 May.

St Katherine's Gardens is a green space in Northampton town centre that was once the site of the 19th Century church of St Katherine. It provides a walkway between Northgate Bus Station and Horsemarket, and is neighboured by businesses on College Street, St Katherine's Street and King Street.

The Big Help Out encouraged people to support causes they believe in and create a lasting volunteering legacy within the community. The partners aimed to make the gardens a go-to spot within the town centre, by improving the cleanliness and safety of the park - as well as removing graffiti from surrounding walls.

Councillor Andrew Stevens, Chair of The Environmental Services Committee at

Northampton Town Council said: **“St Katherine's Gardens has so much potential as a peaceful green space in an urban area of the town.**

“It's been fantastic to make an appreciable difference to the gardens through this volunteer project and the act of volunteering has been shown in a number of research studies to improve wellbeing, so the whole project is beneficial on many levels.”

The theme for the makeover was influenced by King Charles' passion for sustainability, biodiversity and the natural world. On the day, volunteers planted sustainable plants, pruned flower beds to encourage the growth of existing wildflowers and tidied up the area. Future plans may include wild grass and flower areas, seating, additional sustainable planters and a floral wellbeing mural.

Mark Mullen, Operations Manager for Northampton Town Centre BID said: **“Northampton's strength lies in its community spirit, and The Big Help Out was the perfect opportunity to harness that spirit and come together to make a positive impact.”**





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ARE YOUR BUILDINGS AND ASSETS PROPERLY INSURED?



Ross Jarvie BSc (Hons) MRICS, Director at DWPS Chartered Surveyors, provides an in-depth look at insurance reinstatement costs.

Councils are finding their assets are worryingly underinsured. I

have recently undertaken several

insurance reinstatement valuations for parish councils within my local area and have found them all to be substantially underinsured based on valuations undertaken only a few years ago. This prompted me to contact SLCC as I felt members should be informed.

Having been involved in property for over 25 years, I have undertaken thousands of surveys over a wide geographical area. The vast majority of these have included an insurance reinstatement cost. The post-Covid world, however, has seen a more volatile economy. Individual factors locally surrounding obtaining materials have increased building and maintenance costs, along with other contributing issues pushing up prices, such as steel being stuck in the Suez Canal!

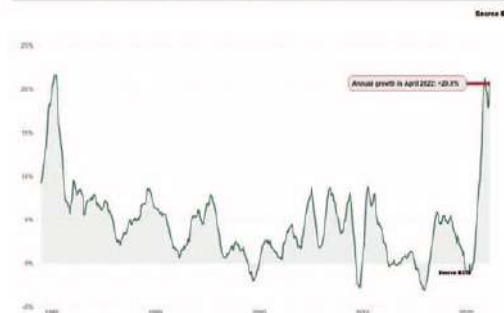
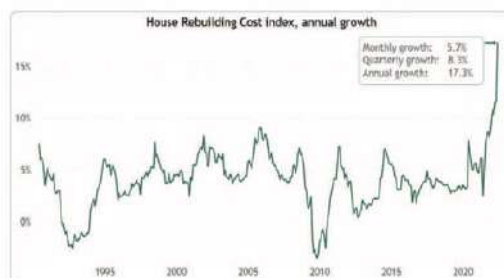
Insurance reinstatement costs have increased significantly as a result of these material costs, along with other economic factors. So much so the traditional method of adding inflation to previous calculations is no longer appropriate. It has become apparent, having undertaken a number of village halls and community asset insurance valuations, there is often a significant discrepancy between the current insurance figure and the amount the property is actually insured for.

There are various risks of being underinsured; the most obvious being in the event of catastrophic loss there will be insufficient funds to reinstate the asset. However, claims can also be significantly reduced as a result of being underinsured. For instance, if you are underinsured by 10% and claim £100,000 your claim may be reduced to £90,000 - causing a funding shortfall of £10,000.

There are several factors that directly impact upon reinstatement cost, including: age, materials used in construction, construction

methodology, geographical location and size. Listed buildings or those within a conservation area are also of particular complexity as there will be restrictions to the type of materials that can be utilised in the rebuild.

It is also vitally important (and often overlooked!) that reinstatement costs be updated if any extensions are carried out. Costs should also include substantial areas of hard standing and an allowance for boundary construction, particularly if stone or brick walls form the perimeter.



I know several local authorities and parish councils are looking at improving the thermal efficiency of the assets and reducing consumption of services. Installations such as rainwater harvesting, air source heat pumps and solar panels should also be incorporated into revised insurance valuations. Although some of these may be separately insured and warrantied by manufacturer and installers.

A qualified member of the Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors (RICS) will be able to account for all these factors in carrying out an insurance valuation on your asset.

I am sure many parish councils work closely with surveying firms, and some will be able to provide this service. Once the updated valuation has been obtained, this can be updated on a desktop basis annually or upon insurance renewal at, one would assume, a minimal charge.

If, however, you are struggling to obtain the information you require please do not hesitate to contact me directly and I will be happy to assist or recommend someone who can. It is frequently more cost effective to have all buildings/assets valued at the same time as these can be incorporated into a single report.

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EMPLOYMENT ADVICE



Eye can see clearly now...

Ian Smith, SLCC National Employment Advisor, looks at employer health and

safety responsibilities for staff using display screen equipment.

The question of eyesight and tests for using screens quite often crops up and I am asked 'does my employer have to pay for my glasses?' As ever, the answer is, it depends. Firstly, all employers must protect workers from the risks associated with the use of what is termed display screen equipment (DSE).

There are several topics under this heading, including:

- Workstations and assessments
- Work routines and breaks
- Eyesight testing
- Working with DSE at home

Workstations and assessments

Employers must carry out an assessment if workers use continuously DSE as part of their normal work, for an hour or more. This should include looking at the whole workstation, including equipment, furniture and work conditions, the job being done, and any special requirements needed, such as when the user has a disability. Where there are risks identified they should take steps to reduce them.

Work routine and breaks

The law says employers must plan work so there are breaks or changes of activity. However, there is no legal definition on how long breaks should be. This depends on what type of work you are doing, but as a rule, short breaks taken regularly are better, and it is preferable to take five or ten minutes every hour than 20 minutes every two hours.

It is possible to work on other tasks, such as phone calls or meetings to break up the use of DSE. Employees should plan to get up from the screen and move around and change posture every now and then.

Eyes and eyesight testing

The law says employers must arrange an eye test for DSE users if they ask for one and provide glasses if the employee needs them only for DSE use. Evidence shows DSE work does not

cause permanent damage to the eyes, but long spells of use can lead to:

- Tired eyes
- Discomfort
- Temporary short sightedness
- Headaches

Employees can help this by:

- Checking the screen is well positioned and properly adjusted
- Making sure lighting conditions are suitable
- Taking regular breaks from screen work

Eye tests

Employers must provide an eyesight test for a DSE user if they request one and pay for the test. This should be a full eye and eyesight test by an optometrist or doctor, including a vision test and an eye examination.

However, it's up to the employer how they provide this. For example, they could let users arrange the tests and reimburse them later, or they could send all their DSE users to one optician.

Provision of glasses

Employers only need to pay for glasses for DSE work if the test shows they need special glasses prescribed for the distance the screen is viewed at. If an ordinary prescription is suitable, employers do not have to pay for glasses.

Home working

The regulations also apply to workers who:

- Work at home on a permanent or long-term basis
- Routinely split their time between their workplace and home

Workers are DSE users if they work on DSE daily, for continuous periods of an hour or more. They don't apply to those who use DSE occasionally or for short periods of time.

Employers must carry out a DSE assessment for each individual. In most cases the employer will not have to visit them to carry this out as employees may do a self-assessment. Guidance on applying ergonomics, and a practical DSE workstation checklist, is available on the Health and Safety Executive's website <https://www.hse.gov.uk/>.

The overriding message is to take breaks and adjust your posture when using DSE.

Which reminds me, I must have an eye test – and get SLCC to pay for it!

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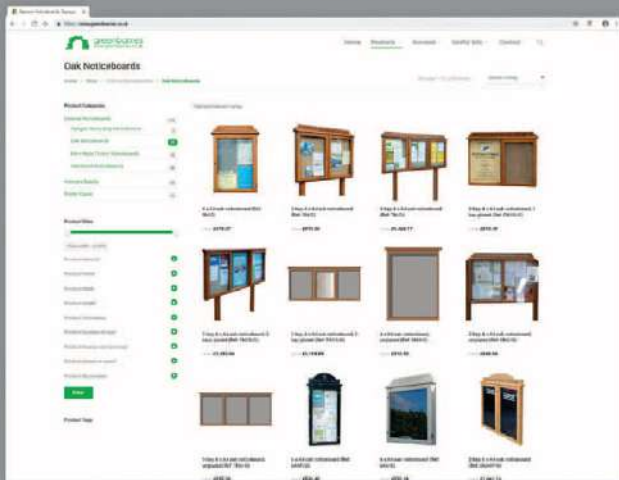
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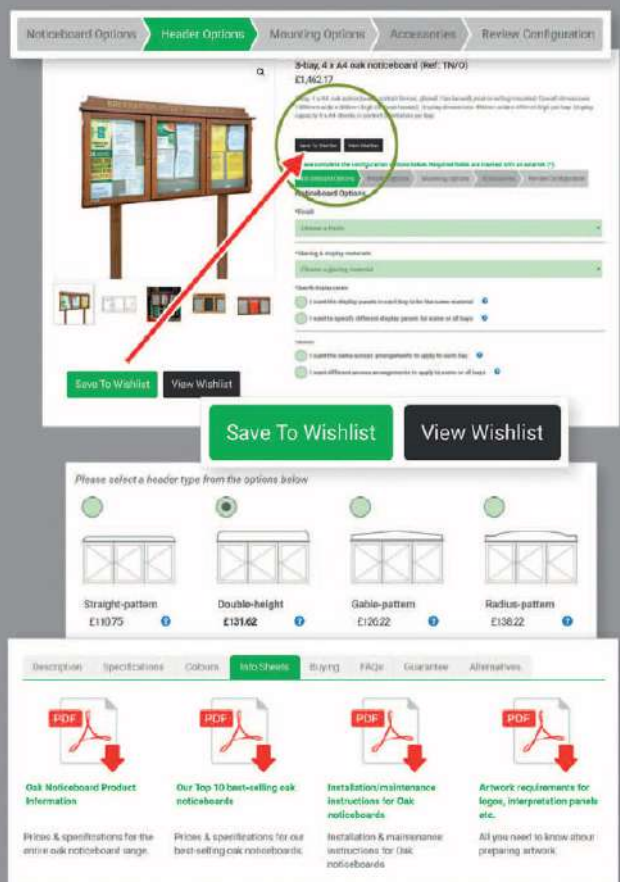
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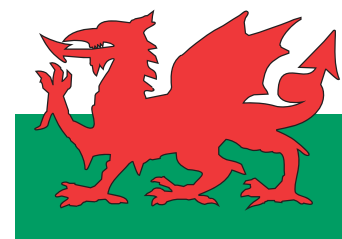


MARK'S MUSINGS



Farewell

Mark Galbraith, SLCC Wales Policy Liaison Officer, bids farewell and reflects on his time as a regular contributor to The Clerk magazine.



Well colleagues, it's time to bid you farewell. This is my final magazine contribution to The Clerk in my capacity as Wales Policy Liaison Officer.

This is an important duty which must be attended to. Several councils are still not reporting councillor payments to the IRPW despite this being a statutory obligation. Further information about this duty is provided in the latest version of the Finance and Governance Toolkit (November 2022) under Theme B Leadership and People, statements B6 and B7 respectively. Please read the toolkit guidance and make sure you send off the necessary information to the IRPW, assuming you haven't done so already.

Invariably all good things come to an end, and so it is with the Mark's Musings column which has been a constant feature in The Clerk since September 2014 - hard to believe perhaps but true. The November 2023 issue of The Clerk signifies the end of a self-fulfilling journey for yours truly so allow me the opportunity of a little self-indulgent reflection through this final article if you will please.

It has been a privilege to write articles for Welsh member clerks over the last nine years and it is something I have embraced with diligence and responsibility to you, the reader. I'm proud not to have missed a single issue of the magazine since I started contributing to the magazine all those years ago.

The challenge and responsibility has been to write articles that appeal to the vast majority of clerks and thinking and planning articles a few months in advance of magazine deadlines while always weighing up the timing and relevance of what to write about. Hopefully, for the most part you've found Mark's Musings interesting and valuable to you and your role.

I referred at the start of the article to my position of Wales Policy Liaison Officer - a role which I have elected to relinquish after much thought and deliberation. The time is right to move on and perhaps give someone else the exciting opportunity of representing the interests of clerks in Wales.

It's hard to contemplate where the years have gone. It only seems like the other day when I took a call from the then interim Chief Executive of the Society, Mr Richard Walden. I recall the telephone conversation as if they were yesterday, when Richard asked whether I'd consider writing for the magazine. Richard came up with the suggestion of calling the feature - 'Mark's Musings' and was content to let me have a few days to think it over.

After I got over the initial surprise of Richard's proposal, which in all sincerity took me less than five seconds to consider, of course I said "yes". I mean, come on, what an opportunity and besides, what else was I going to say to the esteemed Mr Walden. You don't say "no" to Richard when he comes calling - given his professional standing and reputation within the sector. For those of you who know me well you've learned that "no" isn't in my clerk's vocabulary. I've always liked to help colleagues and deep-down Richard knew this before making the phone call...and the rest is history as they say.

So, it's time now for someone else to take up the quill and become a regular Wales-based contributor to this wonderful magazine of ours. I wonder who this will be - after all there are many of you out there more than capable, you just need a gentle nudge and a little persuasion to take the next step to regularly share your thoughts, knowledge and experience to help and support your fellow clerks.

Finally, all that remains for me to do is to thank the SLCC for dedicating the page space in The Clerk to the 'Mark's Musings' feature for so many years. I would also like to wish you, the reader all the very best for the future. Whatever life brings you I wish you lots of joy and success. Take care and see you later!





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CIVILITY AND RESPECT PROJECT UPDATE



IN COLLABORATION WITH SLCC, NALC, OVV, COUNTY ASSOCIATIONS



Hazel Broatch, Civility and Respect Project Manager, gives an update on Phase 2 of the Civility and Respect project, serious/chronic failure and intervention tools.

Civility and Respect Pledge

It's great to see councils continue to support the Pledge, with 1,348 town and parish councils signed up. This shows ongoing commitment to ensuring civility and respect are at the heart of our sector. It also sends a powerful message to local communities that their local councils are committed to being civil and respectful.

Phases 1 and 2 of the Civility and Respect Project

The project manager for Phase 1 was Michelle Moss. Michelle worked with workstream teams bringing together experience of town and parish councils and of county associations, National Associations of Local Councils (NALC) and SLCC. External expertise was bought in as needed. A significant number of resources were developed during Phase 1 to help those experiencing civility and respect issues. These resources can be found on the NALC and SLCC websites.

One focus of Phase 2 is looking into serious/chronic failures (where making a difference normally requires external interventions). This phase is being project managed by me.

Phase 2: progress to date Intervention workshop, 13 July 2023

19 delegates from central government, principal local councils, NALC, SLCC and local finance sector (including a representative of the Internal Audit Forum) met on 13 July 2023 to share their experience, with the aim of further improving civility and respect in the local council sector. The workshop concentrated on serious/chronic failures in town and parish councils.

The delegates were open and willing to help the Civility and Respect Project by identifying types of resources that could help interventions to turn around serious/chronic failures in local councils. By the end of the workshop, a list of intervention tools was produced, including an assessment of how easy or challenging they would be to deliver.

All in attendance agreed the workshop was worthwhile. Whilst these serious/chronic failures tend to be rarer, they are catastrophic when they happen. They are also damaging to the reputation and credibility of the sector.

Intervention tools: progress to date

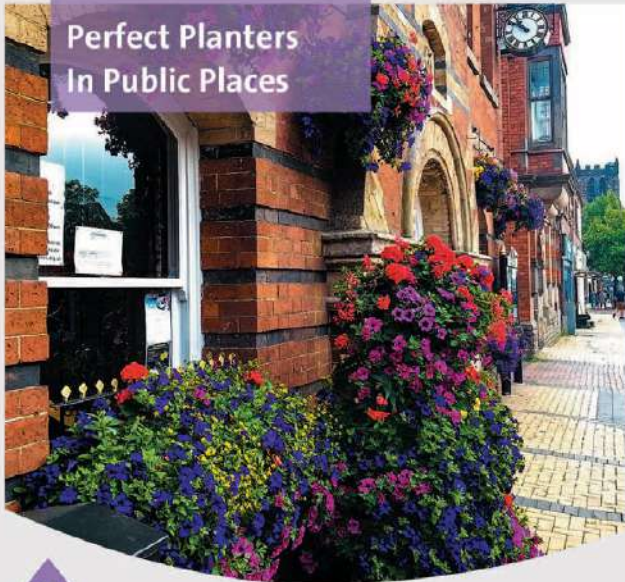
Work has started on some interventions. Three key ones currently being progressed are:

1. The Internal Audit Forum has taken a report to the Joint Panel on Accountability and Governance's (JPAG) September meeting with proposals for improving and broadening the scope of the internal audit process. The intervention workshop identified internal audit is the only annual process which involves an external person/body going into a town or parish council looking in some detail at its affairs. It could also play an important role in identifying local councils that were dealing with serious failures in terms of finance and governance
2. A survey of monitoring officers has been designed and has been published on Lawyers in Local Government's (LLG) website early in September. LLG are in direct contact with all monitoring officers. The aim is to:
 - a. improve our understanding of issues (involving local councils) being reported to monitoring officers
 - b. the lessons to be learnt from these
 - c. what intervention tools monitoring officers think might make a difference
3. Research is being undertaken into the idea (which also came out of the workshop) of developing a scheme of peer-to-peer reviews/mentoring. This would hopefully support local councils who have (or someone else has) been identified as being at risk of serious/chronic failure.

The above work will also include investigating resourcing and other implications as part of assessing feasibility. Consultation with relevant bodies will go on throughout the development of the above.

Please share thoughts/suggestions/observations you have for Phase 2 with Hazel who can be contacted by emailing hazel.broatch@nalc.gov.uk.

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INTERNATIONAL INSTITUTE OF MUNICIPAL CLERKS REGION XI SYMPOSIUM AND VERENIGING VAN GRIFFINS ANNUAL CONFERENCE



Victoria Taylor PSLCC, Clerk to Haddenham Parish Council in Cambridgeshire, and Jenna Munday, Deputy Town Clerk to Broseley Town Council in Shropshire, both



Community Governance Level 4 students, spent two days in Amsterdam extending their learning and networking.

International learning for Community Governance students

Amsterdam was the venue for the International Institute of Municipal Clerks (IIMC) Region XI Symposium and Vereniging Van Griffins (VvG) Annual Conference on 20 and 21 September 2023.

SLCC kindly sponsored two delegate places for Community Governance students at this year's event. We were delighted to be awarded these and excited to extend our learning as well as take advantage of the excellent networking opportunities.

At the symposium on 21 September (after some early morning flights!), we enjoyed insightful presentations from Jackie Weaver, Author of the handbook 'You do have the authority here', and Peter Fleming, LGA Chair of Improvement and Innovation and former leader of Sevenoaks District Council, before a multi-national panel discussion about life-long learning for democratic officers. The symposium concluded with a reflective talk from Eva Eikhout, a young lady who despite her physical disabilities has an exceptional outlook on life. She is truly inspirational. After a buffet dinner and fabulous evening entertainment we headed back to the hotel for the night.

I'm not a leader; I'm just a clerk

The VvG Annual Conference took place on Friday 22 September at the International Theatre Amsterdam, a magnificent historic building.

We enjoyed an insightful presentation 'A Short History of Democracy in the Netherlands'. The differences between UK systems and those in the Netherlands were wider than we anticipated, and the session proved to be thought provoking. It is evident we can all learn from each other, sharing best practice and improving the service we offer as a result.

We were then thrilled to be attending a workshop by Camilla Pitman, City Clerk for Greenville, South Carolina. The topic of discussion was 'Finding the Leader in You'. Camilla asked, "do you consider yourself a leader?" Prior to the workshop we'd never stopped to realise that indeed we are all leaders, but now while reflecting on



our own personal and working life experiences, it is evident that we as clerks are leaders. We deal with challenges every day, no two days are the same, and we do lead our councils to achieve the best results. Being passionate about achieving the end goal motivates you to achieve the end result. Your confidence and leadership provide security to those who depend on you, as well as allowing you to carefully consider important decisions and follow due process. By applying all of that you will be fulfilling the role of clerk.

We all have the ability to lead challenging situations that ultimately lead to an emergency decision for your council. It could be that the public toilets have been vandalised and must close for health and safety reasons to protect the general public. How did you do this? You instructed staff and contractors, informed the police and insurance provider of the damage, informed members of the public that the facility will close, sought costs to repair damage, called a meeting to inform council and get those costs approved, and got the facility back up and running. You led the situation! We motivate ourselves to do the very best we can, and by doing this we also lead others to perform at their best too. This has huge benefits, not only for us personally, but for our communities too. Determine your leadership goals and qualities today, because believe it or not WE ARE ALL LEADERS!

Thank you to SLCC and our course leaders; this opportunity has deepened our learning and improved our practice, but at the same time, it was great fun to be part of!

FINANCE ADVICE



Alan Mellor, SLCC Finance and VAT Advisor, looks at financial issues affecting allotments, explains the basics of the council tax base and offers advice on 2024/25 precept setting.

Allotments

For a relatively small service area, allotments have been the subject of many legislative acts dating back to the early 1800s. The law relating to allotments is complex as numerous changes and additions have been made over the intervening years. The following points provide pointers regarding financial issues that may need to be considered in the operation of allotments by parish councils:

- **Allotment rents** – along with fees and charges that a parish council levy it is good practice to review allotment rents annually, usually as part of the budget setting process. However, most allotments are let on the basis of an annual tenancy with a notice period of one year for any rent increases. This results in a time lag between any agreement to increase rents and the application of new rates to achieve additional income.

Most types of allotments include a provision for rents to be set at a rate that a tenant may reasonably be expected to pay. It is unclear how such a test can be measured and judged appropriate or not by your parish council.

In my experience, most councils consider what increase should be applied to reflect the current underlying rate of inflation. This assumes that existing base rents are acceptable as being reasonable.

It is a good idea to assess your rents against those of neighbouring parish councils and/or other providers to ensure they aren't significantly out of line with the local market.

- **Allotments & VAT** – income from allotments is classed as a non-business activity and is outside the VAT scope. VAT paid on expenditure incurred to operate allotments is classed as business activity and can be recovered from HMRC in the usual manner.
- **Allotment accounting** – it is advisable and good practice to record income and expenditure relating to allotments as a separate cost centre; the council is then aware of both costs of operating the allotments and income generated. If income generated from allotment rents exceeds expenditure incurred, resulting in a net income position, members may

challenge the need for rent increases. However, most parish councils will not, as a matter of course, apportion payroll costs associated with managing and administering services to the cost centre for each service. In my experience, allotments require a significant input of staff time to manage and administer them, often disproportionate to income generated. If staff costs are added to other expenditure this will invariably bring the cost centre into a net cost position.

- **Sale of allotments** – councils can only sell land acquired for the purpose of an allotment with the consent of the Secretary of State. Any capital receipt received from a sale must be used for the purpose of allotments unless the Secretary of State has consented otherwise (see Allotments Act 1925 para. 8).

Budgets for 2024/25

Council tax base

This is a key figure required for councils to calculate their council tax charge for the next financial year. It represents the number of properties in your parish expressed according to the Band D equivalent. Your precept, divided by this figure, gives the annual council tax Band D charge. All billing authorities are required to calculate the council tax base for the next year and advise each parish of the figure between 1 December - 31 January.

In a normal year this figure remains fairly static, or increases, as usually more new properties are built than those demolished. However, parish councils can see this figure being reduced if billing authorities increase provision for bad debts and/or potential increase in number of households claiming council tax benefit. An early conversation with your billing authority may assist in understanding their thinking on this, enabling you to model the impact of any reduction.

Precept setting

Many billing authorities request and encourage parish councils to set precepts as early as possible before the next financial year. Parish councils are required to set their precept before 1 March. Given uncertainties that surround 2024/25 inflation rates, I suggest that in this financial climate, parish councils delay setting their precept until the middle of February, which enables your council to set it with the latest information available.

SEVENOAKS BECOMES THE FIRST OFFICIAL TOWN OF SANCTUARY

Feature
Sevenoaks Town Council



Linda Larter MBE FSLCC, Chief Executive and Town Clerk to Sevenoaks Town Council in Kent, describes the process her council went through to become the first Town of Sanctuary.



The City of Sanctuary movement is to encourage a more welcoming UK for people forced to flee their homes.

It is a vast network of ordinary people around the country stepping up to support those seeking sanctuary in our communities. The Sanctuary Awards programme recognises and celebrates the organisations and institutions that go above and beyond to create welcome, compassionate and empowering opportunities for people seeking sanctuary.

Maggie Filipova-Rivers, Regional Coordinator, City of Sanctuary said: “We all have a part to play in building a culture of welcome, inclusion and empowerment for people seeking sanctuary. We are thrilled that our very first town council has received recognition for its ongoing work to support those fleeing violence and persecution.

“They have clearly demonstrated that they are embedding inclusion and welcome across a variety of council services and that they are working collaboratively with key local organisations and people who lived experience to enable them to rebuild their lives in Sevenoaks.”

Sevenoaks Town Council started to consider applying for Town of Sanctuary status in 2023, to firstly recognise the considerable amount of voluntary work that had been undertaken under the umbrella of ‘Sevenoaks Welcomes Refugees’ organisation.

It also wanted to publicly state the inclusivity of the town that offers a warm welcome to those in difficult circumstances.

Here is a brief outline of the process Sevenoaks Town Council went through to obtain the Award:

- September 2022 ● Council resolution to become a Town of Sanctuary
- January 2023 ● Sign up to City of Sanctuary Local Authority Network
- January 2023 ● Produce Sevenoaks Town of Sanctuary strategy and action plan 2023-2026
- January 2023 ● Council resolution to approve Sevenoaks Town of Sanctuary strategy and action plan 2023-2026
- February 2023 ● Submit application online for Sanctuary Award status
- February 2023 ● Meetings with stakeholders, including ‘Sevenoaks Welcomes Refugees’
- May 2023 ● Local elections. New mayor chooses Sevenoaks Welcomes Refugees as one of her charities
- May 2023 ● Assessment grid prepared and worked on with assessor
- June 2023 ● Formal assessment meeting – Town Council, Sevenoaks Welcomes Refugees, and refugee representatives
- June 2023 ● Award given
- Outline of future action plan commences
- Promote Town of Sanctuary Award at event and commission bespoke flag in time for refugee week

Further information about the Sanctuary Awards can be found on the City of Sanctuary website <https://cityofsanctuary.org/>.

BOLLINGTON GOES GREEN



Harriet Worrell, Town Manager for Bollington Town Council in Cheshire, shares the many community events introduced through Bollington Goes Green Week.

Inspired by the UK wide Great Big Green Week from 10 -18 June, Bollington Town Council coordinated a number of community events to highlight climate change and protect nature. And so was born Bollington Goes Green week – we even designed our own logo!



Aptly, as climate change is likely to have greater impact on future generations, the first Bollington Goes Green week event was an exhibition featuring artwork from the town's four primary schools. The theme of Bollington Goes Green was fully embraced by each school, with a spectacular display of art in an array of mediums that captured environmental issues, repurposed materials and celebrated the natural world and its protection.

It was not only an opportunity to showcase the talent of local children, but also a platform for younger people to focus on environmental issues and has led to one school developing their very own eco-council.

The Cheshire East Ranger Service volunteered its support by leading a walking talk on wildflower meadow management, visiting a managed wildflower meadow and learning about land preparation and management.

A mid-week talk on Food and Climate Change, delivered by Dr Althea Wilkinson of Manchester University and a member of Transition, highlighted the impact the food industry has on greenhouse emissions and what food choices we can make to lessen the environmental burden. It was a thought-provoking talk for everyone there.



During the week, the community was invited to decorate a window in their home on the theme 'flora and fauna' with the town mayor judging the entries. There were some fabulously creative ideas.

Throughout the week, the council released a series of social media posts including information on plants for pollinators, how to help wildlife, sourcing locally, recycling and reducing waste. Bollington Library also showed their support with a themed book display and information on recycling and reducing food waste.

Our Green Week culminated in a litter pick, with waste disposed of accordingly after being sorted into recyclable and non-recyclable. A community litter pick is a great way to achieve immediate results and always attracts volunteers.



Bollington Town Council recently appointed Cllr David Kent as its Green Champion. The role is to propose and promote actions by Bollington Town Council and residents to reduce carbon emissions in the area. All committees recently had their Terms of Reference updated with 'when making decisions the climate and environmental impact is thoroughly considered and recorded'. With 2030 fast approaching, it is imperative councils are seen to lead the way in reducing carbon emissions and promoting a more sustainable lifestyle.

A YOUNG STUDENT'S REFLECTIONS



Evie Crane, a Harleston Sancroft Academy secondary phase student, shares her experience of spending a week at Harleston Town Council in Norfolk.

I am a student at the secondary phase of Harleston Sancroft Academy, and I was on a week's work experience at Harleston Town Council from the 10 to 14 July 2023. I was asked by the town clerk to write this article about what I got up to.

From the 10 to the 14 July, Harleston Town Council decided to celebrate Local Council Clerk Week (LCCW), which had been promoted by SLCC in the aim to raise the profile of the roles of town and deputy town clerks, whilst recognising the work clerks do for their community.

As part of this, we got involved in many activities and events, such as the selfie frame, to celebrate them, and put a name to their faces.

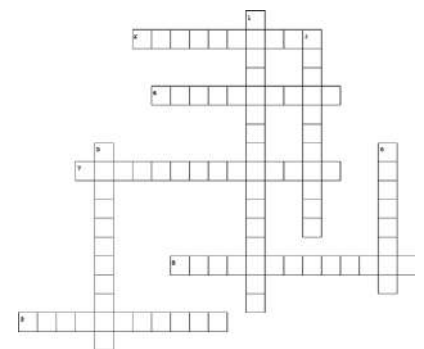
Our clerks created a day-in-the-life 'minute of me' video which was shared on social media to show what our clerks do so they are appreciated by the community for all the hard work they do to help others.

Finally, we prepared many quizzes and puzzles that we shared every day on our social media and on market day (Wednesdays) for residents to take home and complete. We also decided to give these quizzes to Harleston Sancroft Academy for students to complete as a way of sharing the wonders of our town, which is supported by the clerks.

During my week on work experience I learnt lots of new things about the town and the way the council works to support residents. I created puzzles online, such as spot the difference, crosswords and word searches for clerk week, which meant I was sending many emails, photocopying, printing, editing and laminating.

One day I even went into town to buy and make raffle prizes for market day. And in between all these jobs I worked my way through a large pile of paper which needed shredding.

I also worked closely with the leisure centre/gym and helped with small jobs, such as hoovering, checking stock cupboards and first aid kits, stacking weights, and tidying up folders. It was a fun experience working in two different environments and gave me a good understanding of the way in which different people work.



FINDING FOCUS AMIDST A SEA OF IDEAS



Becky Walsh, Comedic Personal Development Trainer, offers life-coach-inspired tips to avoid becoming ambivalent and finding focus.

In the world of local governance, you're no strangers to the hustle and bustle of ideas (good and not so good), responsibilities, and endless possibilities. Just like entrepreneurs, you possess what I like to call an 'interdisciplinary mind'. This means your thoughts flow rapidly, spawning countless ideas, and you're skilled at connecting the dots to find creative solutions. It's a remarkable trait, one I both admire and understand - because, as a life coach and communications officer, I share the same tendencies. However, let's be honest, it can be both a blessing and a curse.

If you have an interdisciplinary mind, also known as a 'Multipotentialite' - as a single person, it can potentially accomplish a lifetime's worth of work several times! So how do we navigate the labyrinth of ideas and find the focus we need? More importantly, how do we stay committed to a project once we've started, resisting the allure of new, shiny distractions?

Psychologists have a term for this predicament - ambivalence. It's that feeling when you have so much in your mind you end up doing nothing. This often happens when we grapple with the complexities of choice, constantly weighing right versus wrong, good versus bad decisions.

What makes individuals like us, with interdisciplinary minds, so fascinating is we challenge the conventional wisdom that says success comes from sticking to one thing, mastering it, and making a fortune. Town, parish and community council clerks are drawn to their role (I believe) because it demands a wide array of skills and offers diverse challenges. I believe, wholeheartedly, it's individuals like us, with our unique abilities, who have the potential to revolutionise society and the world at large.



So, if you find it difficult to focus on one thing at a time or struggle to see a project through to completion, here are three key life-coach-inspired tips to help you:

1. Discover your purpose

Reflect on what irks you the most about the world. It's unlikely to be trees or mushrooms, but more likely to be related to human behaviour. What bothers you about others often mirrors issues in your own life. However, it's also a sign of what you were meant to change in the world. Once you identify this purpose, it becomes the guiding force for all your ideas

2. Delegate and collaborate

Recognise you're an ideas person. Your strength lies in generating and refining ideas. To excel, focus on the aspects you genuinely enjoy and delegate the rest to individuals who excel in those areas. Building a diverse team can be incredibly helpful in this regard

3. Embrace interdependence

Remember, no one has ever achieved success entirely on their own. When you feel overwhelmed or scared, it's often because you're trying to be overly independent. Interdisciplinary minds tend to fall into this trap. Embrace collaboration, seek support when needed, and remember that interdependence is a powerful tool.

The concept of good or bad decisions often stems from a lack of self-belief. You must trust yourself to make the right choices and have faith you can rectify them if they turn out differently. Self-faith is your greatest asset, far more crucial than mere confidence.

And if all else fails, I have a 5* spa retreat coming up in 2024 in the Isle of Man for Burn-out. You can join me in the hot tub there as we unpack who we are and recover from what we do:
<https://www.brightlife.com/event-details/burn-out-how-to-live-vibrantly-and-build-your-life-force-with-becky-walsh>

Becky Walsh is a personal development trainer for SLCC. She has a monthly newsletter called Council Clerking About which is open to clerks and officers. Sign-up for free here <https://dashboard.mailerlite.com/forms/388021/84328733529343657/share>, www.beckywalsh.com

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UPDATE FROM SLCC BOARD OF DIRECTORS



Gina Lopes PSLCC, SLCC Director for the East region, gives an update on the latest SLCC Board of Directors meeting.

On Tuesday 10 October 2023, SLCC Board of Directors gathered for their meeting ahead of the recent National Conference held at Hinckley Island. Chair of the board, Adam Keppel-Green, welcomed everyone and started the meeting.

There were few apologies and after months of Zoom meetings, it was lovely to see fellow directors in person. There was a positive mood in the room and lots of energy with all directors looking forward to the imminent conference.

As well as the Board of Directors, we were honoured with the presence of multiple presidents. Linda Carter FSLCC (then President), Philip Peacock PSLCC (past President), and Malcolm Nicholson PSLCC, (then President Elect), all three attended throughout and had valuable input. We also had Richard Walden FSLCC and Alan Fairchild FSLCC, both Honorary Vice Presidents and renowned for their many years of service to SLCC and their wisdom.

There were several items of business to consider, and each matter received a session of healthy debate.

Following on from a detailed report from Chief Executive, Rob Smith, there was agreement to form an International Relations Steering Group.

Shelley Parker FSLCC, External Affairs and Policy Development Manager, gave an update on her recent work. This included action on remote meetings, the need for clarity from the Ministry of Justice and the Church of England regarding parish councils funding places of worship. Shelley confirmed that recent liaison with the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) was positive. A webinar on Martyn's Law will take place on the 16 November 2023 to raise awareness of the new legislation and will follow on from a session by key speaker Figen Murray, OBE, at National Conference.

A hot topic was the revision of the model contract of employment, this prompted a long and detailed discussion. It was felt a jointly 'badged' contract with the National Association of Local Councils (NALC) was the strongly preferred outcome. Directors considered that, while we should continue the ongoing discussions, members were frustrated and impatient about the delays in producing an updated sector contract. They stressed the need for firm deadlines to be set out as well as consideration of SLCC producing and publishing its own recommended model contract.

The directors received various reports, one of which was an update from Linda Larter MBE FSLCC, Director for the South East region, on the SLCC Educational Trust. Linda confirmed there was now a Board of Trustees, one of whom was independent from the sector. The application for charity status has been submitted and governance is being put in place. The two main objectives of the trust are inspirational:

- To advance, for the public benefit, education, and professional development in the local council sector, in such ways as the charity trustees see fit, including, but not limited to, the provision of grants, bursaries and other forms of assistance
- To advance public awareness of the role of local councils and the roles of those who work within it

There were a few formal items around the Annual General Meeting (AGM) and then Adam thanked everyone and closed the meeting.

It was a very productive couple of hours and our next board meeting will be on 30 January 2024 at Kenilworth, just before the start of Practitioners' Conference.

Information about the Board of Directors can be found by visiting www.slcc.co.uk/governance/board-of-directors/

NATIONAL FORUM REVIEW



Jane Olds, PSLCC, SLCC National Forum Vice-Chair and Oxfordshire Branch Representative, provides a summary of the latest National Forum meeting.

It was lovely to be able to have so many colleagues from branches in

both England and Wales join us for our October in-person meeting, which we held just before the SLCC Annual General Meeting on 10 October in Leicestershire.

Carl Hearn, National Forum Chair and Clerk to Tavistock Town Council, welcomed everyone and we confirmed the minutes of the previous meeting.

The SLCC Board of Directors had met earlier in the day and Adam Keppel-Green FSLCC, SLCC Board of Directors Chair and Clerk to Knutsford Town Council, gave a verbal update on the board's discussions, including an update about the SLCC Educational Trust, and the staff employment template contract together with the pay scale structure. The forum endorsed the board's approach to encourage ongoing discussions with National Association of Local Councils (NALC) over the jointly 'badged' model contract but welcomed considering further courses of action if this was not forthcoming.

Bruce Poole FSLCC, Somerset Branch National Forum Reserve Representative, introduced the International Institute of Municipal Clerks (IIMC) and asked everyone to use their votes when the opportunity to elect board members arose. IIMC's work in promoting international relations is of great benefit and importance to the sector.

Shelley Parker FSLCC, SLCC External Affairs and Policy Development Manager, gave an update which included progress on the Levelling Up and Regeneration Bill including the Lords' clause for local authorities to meet virtually and the funding for places of worship, a meeting with the team at the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, the Community Ownership Fund, Martyn's Law and various consultations.

Naomi Bibi, Head of Member Services, gave an update on the progress on a meeting with Barclays Bank (see news article on

SLCC's website for more information), the Principles of Internal Auditing Local Councils course which had been slightly delayed but it was hoped would be ready in the spring, the Central Digital and Data Office project to encourage all councils to convert to gov.uk domain names, environmental site audits with Future Leap, and the Civility and Respect project.

The first Local Council Clerk Week in July had been well received and will take place again next year – the dates will be announced in due course.

Following the reports, Michael King, SLCC Director North Region and Clerk to Whitby Town Council, updated the group on the workings of the Smaller Authorities' Audit Appointments (SAAA). Then we split into groups to discuss questions which Alan Mellor, SLCC Finance and VAT Advisor, had posed in the September edition of *The Clerk* to help inform the Joint Panel on Accountability and Governance (JPAG) for the next review of the Practitioners' Guide, which resulted in a lively debate.

We also had a submission to consider. Lance Allan FSLCC (Trowbridge Town Council) representing the Wiltshire Branch, asked whether it was appropriate to publish the pay details where the clerk was the sole employee. Following a discussion, it was agreed that the Advice Team would write a guidance note for the Advice Library.

The National Forum is the members' voice and we're there to bring things to the attention of the board and to hold the board to account.

We would love to welcome more submissions from branches, so don't just say 'why don't they do that' amongst yourselves – tell us what you think and how you think that SLCC can help resolve it.

Information about the National Forum can be found by visiting www.slcc.co.uk/governance/national-forum/

ACCESSIBLE ALLOTMENTS AND COMMUNITY POLYTUNNEL



Lorraine Jeffs, Town Clerk and General Manager at Whitehill Town Council in Hampshire, discusses the set-up of the council's new accessible allotment plots and the far reaching benefits of their community polytunnel.

Accessible allotment plots

Whitehill Town Council has developed accessible allotment plots at both of our allotment sites purchased through grant funding, and these have proven to be very popular with people with physical disabilities that affect mobility. This could include arthritis, injuries, inherited or acquired conditions. There are a number of raised beds of various dimensions that can be worked using a no or minimal dig system which will be shared by two allotment tenants, where you can grow fruit and vegetables from the raised beds.



A touch of the good life!

The council has also purchased a polytunnel using funding from East Hampshire District Council's (EHDC) Healthy New Town grant. The polytunnel is located in Bordon and has been available for use from May 2022, primarily by youth and community groups and schools in the Whitehill and Bordon area.

It is used as a horticulture project hub to grow floral displays, plants and food which are re-used in the town with the produce going to the Bordon Food Bank and to Abri to help where there are food shortages. This benefits children who require this type of outdoor learning and social environment



facility to obtain new skills. We aim for this to grow into our first climate change awareness hub, introducing solar panels to produce lighting for the structure, reuse of waste materials and usage of natural substances whilst showing children these techniques when using the polytunnel.

★ 2023 SLCC AWARDS WINNERS



★ Long Service Award:

Sue Templeman, Ackworth Parish Council, Roger Greenwood, Heptonstall Parish Council, Rodney Duggua, Chichester City Council

Sue retired on 9 June 2023 after 31 years' service to Ackworth Parish Council. Sue will be greatly missed by her colleagues in the Wakefield District and the rest of the West Yorkshire Branch. Sue was always there for her colleagues, with a friendly approach and a wealth of knowledge.

Roger was appointed Clerk to Heptonstall Parish Council in May 1963 and has served his council continuously for the last 60 years until retiring in July 2023. Roger has also served as a representative to National Association of Local Councils (NALC), YLCA and as SLCC West Yorkshire Branch Chair.

Rodney retired in April 2023 after 20 years at Chichester District Council followed by 25 years at Chichester City Council. Rodney has been in local government in some shape or form for 51 years, has been an engaged and active member, regular event-attender and correspondent.

★ New Clerk of the Year Award:

Ross Willmott, Mountsorrel Parish Council

Ross joined Mountsorrel Parish Council in January 2021 with no prior parish clerk experience. Since joining, Ross has transformed the council. Recommendations of a 2020 peer review have been implemented, reserves increased, several large grants secured, his leadership has delivered better village floral displays, the creation of a friends' group to improve Castle Gardens, financial investments in new and existing children's play areas, first council run Remembrance parade, Platinum Jubilee celebrations with firework displays, improved Christmas lights and switch on with fireworks, full health and safety reviews, VAS signs, office refurbishment, 26 acres of green space and £500k S106 funding for a new sports and recreation area, two unqualified audits, new website, and he has completed the Certificate in Local Council Administration (CILCA). Most significantly, Ross led the successful re-opening of the MMC – the council's community theatre, arts venue, and café.

★ Best Magazine Article Award:

Matthew Gleadell, Newark Town Council

As Clerk to Newark Town Council, **Matthew** has embraced the role fully. Newark has a long history with Poland and his informative article surrounding the events of the Repatriation of Three Polish Presidents was a wonderful read. Not only did Matthew tell a brilliant story, he also highlighted matters that other clerks should be aware of, such as laws and procedures of exhumation and the benefits of gaining professional advice from organisations such as the Institute of Cemetery and Crematorium Management (ICCM).

★ Bryan Metcalf Award for Volunteering:

Gina Lopes PSLCC, Easton Parish Council

A stalwart of the profession, **Gina** has spent hundreds of hours supporting clerks in Norfolk in many ways in a voluntary capacity. As a Norfolk Branch Executive member for many years, Gina's held several officer roles, including as Secretary, Mentoring Officer, Vice-Chair and currently Chair. Gina keeps the branch going with her enthusiasm and dedication, always passionate about raising the profile of clerks, empowering them to feel valued. Gina has spent many years as an SLCC Board Director representing the East region, always passionate and committed, especially about civility, respect, and standards. Her dedication is unwavering. She is an exemplary volunteer within our sector and a great asset.

★ Best Case Study at a Residential or Training Event:

Helen Ball FSLCC, Shrewsbury Town Council

Helen held a presentation at the 2023 Practitioners' Conference titled 'Youth Engagement', a real eye opener to the various ways that a council can provide facilities and access to activities for even the most disenfranchised young person. Some of the stories of success brought tears to participants' eyes. Whilst Shrewsbury have achieved this to a significant level (with large amounts of resource and finance) and are reaching many young people, Helen's passion to make a difference, along with very practical advice and ideas, has been a huge factor in driving (much smaller) plans forward in her nominator's parish.

★ Myrna Liles Cup Award for Branch Membership Growth:

West Wales Branch

This award is not nominated but given to the branch that had the most growth this year.

★ John Crompton Cup for Mentoring:

Claire Commons FSLCC, Shepton Mallet Town Council

Having joined SLCC as Somerset Mentor at the beginning of 2023, **Claire** has supported several new clerks with navigating their way through the start of their clerking career. Fresh from her Community Governance journey, she has provided invaluable support, assisting them with prioritising workloads and tackling difficulties. Claire's extensive experience in clerking has provided her with a wealth of knowledge that she has been able to impart, and her positive and encouraging attitude has helped to build new clerks' confidence and made them feel supported in their roles. Her dedication to help others succeed is a testament to her passion for the field and her commitment to making a difference in the world.

★ Outstanding Contribution Award:

Mark Galbraith, Llanelli Rural Community Council and SLCC Wales Policy Liaison Officer

A professionally qualified Chartered Secretary specialising in local government, **Mark** has worked in the sector for 37 years. Clerk to Llanelli Rural Council, the biggest community council in Wales, since 2001, he became SLCC's Wales Policy Liaison Officer in 2015, representing SLCC on all matters associated with Welsh local council policy, liaising with Welsh Government, Audit Wales, Welsh Local Government Association, One Voice Wales and other public sector bodies. Recent significant sector contributions include framing SLCC's response to the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021 and serving on the Task Group responsible for developing the Toolkit for improving governance and financial management in the local council sector. He has been a regular contributor to The Clerk magazine. He is hard working, dedicated, professional, good-humoured and a pleasure to work with.

★ Chief Executive's Staff Award:

Wayne German, SLCC Sales and Marketing Assistant

Wayne started at SLCC just under five years ago as temporary maternity cover. SLCC's eagle-eyed Head of Marketing, Gemma Rickard, saw that Wayne was someone who needed to stay. Wayne's professional and personal development whilst at SLCC has been nothing short of inspiring. He is a conscientious team member, his personable manner a pleasure to work with, and

has a relentless drive to learn, adapt, and grow. He has played a pivotal role in key projects that have propelled SLCC forward and constantly demonstrates his willingness to go above and beyond, all whilst continuously supporting his colleagues.

★ Certificate in Local Council Administration (CiLCA) Exemplary Award:

Sarah Edmunds, Goring on Thames Parish Council (Oxfordshire), Stephanie Kirby, Prudhoe Town Council (Northumberland), Ann Lyon, Dursley Town Council (Gloucestershire), and Stephen Smith PSLCC, Wool Parish Council (Dorset)

Throughout the year, CiLCA assessors have work submitted to them by their candidates. According to rules laid down by SLCC's awarding body Ascentis, assessors are only allowed to make two decisions; to award a pass or to declare the submission 'not ready' and refer it back for additional work. In practice, the assessors have felt that awarding a pass did not give enough credit to some candidates who have gone above and beyond the assessment criteria in their portfolios. As a result, it was decided locally that assessors could use the accolade 'exemplary submission' in their summary feedback for a unit. Although not an official category, it has been appreciated by candidates, and this year it was decided to make an SLCC Exemplary Award to those awarded accolades on all modules.

★ Honorary Vice President Award:

Johnathan Bourne FSLCC, SLCC Senior Support Tutor

Retired from Royal Wootton Bassett Town Council after 32 years, **Johnathan** has served local councils for a total of 36 years. He has also served SLCC's Wiltshire Branch as Training Officer, Vice-Chair, Chair and National Executive Council (NEC) Representative. He has been a Cabinet Member on NEC for 14 years, Vice-Chair and Chair (twice). He has a lifelong commitment to learning, with a BA in Public Administration, and is a key member of the Community Governance team where he is currently a Senior Support Tutor. Through his decades of service, much of Johnathan's spare time has been spent inspiring hundreds of clerks with his depth of understanding of the political and public arena, having challenged them to achieve goals they often believed beyond their reach. Through his work with Community Governance students he continues to show extraordinary personal and strategic leadership to the profession.

★ Pauline Whitehead Perseverance Award:

Celia Price PSLCC, Lancing Parish Council

See separate in-depth article on page 36.



FROM THE ARCHIVES



SLCC's Sales and Marketing Assistant, Wayne German, looks back at previous editions of The Clerk that have featured articles on allotments.



December 1974 – An article titled ‘Statutory Allotments’

Allotments are in great demand at the present time, however, many allotments remain uncultivated or only partly cultivated due to many differing causes, such as a person only being able to manage part of the allotment.

My council has three allotment sites, which take up very valuable land, and the council is frequently bombarded with a request for a plot of land "as it appears to be derelict". Even so I am not advocating giving up the allotments.

Faced with this problem the council considered the question, and eventually circulated all allotment holders to ask if they were prepared to give up one half of their allotment to allow the council to try and deal with the long waiting list for plots. There was a marvellous response, so much so that the council was able to nearly double the number of allotment holders on the same amount of land.

March 1976 – An article titled ‘Allotment Rents, Whether to Raise or Not to Raise’

Allotment rents are not controlled by the counter-inflation legislation and local authorities are not debarred from increasing their allotment rents.

Many councils throughout the country have not raised allotment rents for some years, so that their rent levels are low by present standards.

Rents that may be charged for allotments let by local authorities are governed by Sec. 10(1) of the Allotments Act-1950, which requires the local authority to let their allotments at such rent as tenants may reasonably be expected to pay, but they may charge a lower rent if the personal circumstances of a tenant warrants it.

Winter 1989 – An article titled ‘Allotments Under Threat They Must Be Preserved’

The wholesale disposal of allotment sites in the 1960s was seen off by the growing movement of environmental interest, community use of vacant land, organic growing, health and fresh air that was liberated in the following decade. Waiting lists replaced vacancies. Now allotments have become a central leisure pursuit - one family in 40 has one.

Unfortunately, the 1988 Local Government, Planning and Land Act did away with the requirement of local authorities to provide the DoE with allotment statistics. With over 10,000 authorities likely to have some responsibility for them, it is difficult to get a complete picture today, and of course this is convenient for those who can point to one or two sites with tall weeds infuriating the surviving plot holders.

Spring 1993 – An article titled ‘Parish Council Allotments’

Eastergate Parish Council in West Sussex has provided allotments to rent for residents of the parish, and some from other parishes since 1976. The law relating to allotments is set out in a number of statutes known as the Allotments Acts 1908 to 1950, and parish councils are allotment authorities, and have powers to provide allotments (under five acres in area) or allotment gardens, which are parcels of land cultivated by the occupier for vegetables and fruit crops for the family. There is a statutory obligation to provide allotment gardens if there is shown to be a demand by local residents, although the land does not need to be within the parish of the council providing it, as long as it is reasonably accessible to users. In England, district councils, which are not allotment authorities, may hire land to a local council for use as allotments.