

## Introduction

During February and March 2022, I undertook 3 Zoom Training Sessions, namely Local Government Finance, The Future of Planning and Effective Chairmanship. I will provide a brief synopsis of each session in this document. It is interesting to note that the majority of the attendees were the same councillors representing councils across both Surrey and Sussex.

## Local Government Finance

Delivered by Andy Beams

The first point is that the bible for all things Parish Council is Arnold Baker and the 12th edition is the current version; which we have in the office. The most important point of the training was that **the World of Local Government is totally different from the business world.**

- Accountability is how we spend our parishioner's money and that we can demonstrate through minutes of meeting how we have achieved this objective.
- WPC is defined as a large council as our annual expenditure exceeds £200k.
- Our constitution is the Standing Orders and this is the basis of our discussions, debate, deliberation and decisions.
- When we set our budget before the deadline in January each year we should
  - Look for trends
  - Remember that it is a live document throughout the Municipal year
  - Have notes on all assumptions made
  - Have a three-year budget forecast for future projects that we might wish to move forward. Items that could be in this forecast are Salaries, Vehicle replacement, Office costs including utilities, Grants, use of earmarked reserves, contracts such as grass cutting
- Once we have purchased an large capital expenditure item (such as our vehicle) the value stays the same throughout the life of the item, there is no depreciation. In order to allow for depreciation, we are allowed to allocate monies into earmarked reserves to purchase a replacement. When we sell a capital expenditure item its final value is entered onto the balance sheet.
- The budget is prepared by the RFO and presented to Council who agree it and are responsible for it throughout the Municipal year.
- The budget is exactly that a set of assumptions set at a point in time. If during the financial year events occur that require the finances in a particular cost centre to be enhanced and there are other cost centres that are under balance, we can vire monies between the various cost centres. In the worst case we would vire from reserves. But in all cases, we have to record all virement though meeting minutes.
- We are required to set a balanced budget, this can be achieved in two ways
  - An increase in the precept
  - Balancing the budget through the use of reserves
  - We cannot set a deficit budget
- You will remember that we set the comparator for the precept on a band D property. This is because the precept is based on 9ths.
  - Band A 6/9, Band B 7/9, Band C 8/9, Band D 9/9, Band E 11/9, Band F 13/9, Band G 15/9 and Band H 18/9. Based on those figures the maximum in Worplesdon is £158.09 per annum

- We review the budget and precept every full council through the bank reconciliation and budget reports, and as these are minuted items we demonstrate our accountability.
- Parish Councils monies are protected by FSCS scheme up to a value of £432,000
- Parish Councils deposits are guaranteed by the scheme up to £85,000 per institution (not individual accounts at a financial institution.)
- We have an internal auditor who the Council select and two audits are carried out each financial year.
- There is an external auditor who is not the Councils choice and is selected by a competitive process.
- The internal and external auditors can have varying views on items.
- We can borrow monies through the Public Works Loan Board (PWLB) at less than market rates, and pay back the monies over 25 or 50 years. However, we have to build a business case and have support from the parish in the form of consultation and responses. WE cannot use a PWLB grant to balance our budget, unless we have a long-term project.

In conclusion the training was both useful and reaffirmed that WPC are following the regulations correctly and are therefore demonstrating full accountability.

## The Future of Planning

Delivered by Flo Churchill

Because of Storm Eunice the training was delivered a week late as Flo Churchill was without power for a full week, and during the presentation her internet dropped out (technology!!!).

Flo is the Interim Director of Planning for Herefordshire and delivered a similar session during 2021.

Since 2021 the proposed Planning White Paper has been abandoned and replaced by the Levelling Up Bill led by Michael Gove. This legislation will be the key document for Planning when it receives Royal Assent (date unknown).

Levelling up will be across the country with a desire to raise the standards to those experienced in the South East. One example given was that bus services should be similar to those experienced in London. The target date for Levelling Up is 2030 or two governments from the current legislator.

- The changes to the legislation will not apply to individual property planning applications.
- There are proposed updates to National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) to define enhanced environment and habitat
- Developers will have to demonstrate a Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) of at least 10%, and it is estimated that this will cost £10k-£15k per dwelling. Net gains will have to be guaranteed by the developer for 30 years.
- Biodiversity will be determined through a metric that is included in the Environment Act.
- If a developer cannot demonstrate BNG on the site they can buy it from other areas.
- BNG is aimed at the recovery of nature and habitats
- There is no definition of a sustainable development
- The proposed legislation has an aim to improve the Green Belt around Towns
- The ability for Parish Councils to comment on Planning Applications is retained
- Local Authorities should know the locations of local habitats
- Local Authorities will need to establish a High Street Task Force

- Local and Neighbourhood Plans will be retained in the Levelling Up legislation. But the two documents still have to pass the tests of delivery of 3 years of housing delivery.
- A Local Design Guide will be required
- Water Neutrality will be an issue to be proven by a developer in a planning application. Water Neutrality is defined as the use of water in the supply area is the same or lower after the development is in place. It should be remembered that the South East is a water stressed area. That is to say there is insufficient water in the area to meet current or future demand.

To end the presentation there were discussions on COP26 and methods of Consultation. Net Zero Strategy featured in this section and how by 2050 decarbonisation will occur in all sectors of the UK economy.

Conclusion this training was both informative but complex to follow. We will need to have further training as the legislation changes over the next few years.

## Effective Chairmanship

Delivered by Anne Bott

There are 83 Parish Councils across Surrey

Less and Less people are coming forward to take on Leadership and engage in Parish Councils

- Chairmanship in the Local Government and in particular Parish or Town Councils is totally different to leading a business meeting
- A lack of respect for the Chair results in poor management – all councillors have a part to play
- Parish Council meetings are a Statutory Meeting and are governed by Standing Orders. The meeting is not a public meeting.
- At the start of the Municipal Year the manner in which meetings are to be managed should be established
  - Limit meetings to 2 hours
  - All speakers need to indicate that they wish to speak on an agenda item and should only do so when requested
  - The Chair needs to record who wishes to speak
  - No interruptions whilst a councillor is speaking
  - The Chair needs to record points for the summing up
  - The Chair then asks for a motion
- The Chair has only one power of a casting vote, they cannot instruct the officers to do work or take responsibility beyond an instruction they have been given by the Council.
- The Chair is the face of the Council
- The debate on an item needs to be fair and even handed
  - Balance is needed
  - Alternative views are always valid
- The integrity of a decision by the Council is enhanced by the debate
- The Chair has to be both open minded and non-judgemental
- The agenda is owned by the Clerk
- The Chair and Clerk will discuss the agenda before the meeting and anticipate any controversial items
- The Chair and Clerk will estimate how long each item on the agenda should take

- Public attendance is always to be anticipated
- The Chair needs to explain that the public have a duty in the meeting. These include
  - The right to speak which will need to be explained
  - Only the Chair engages with the public
  - Councillors need to address any points through the Chair
  - Our Standing Orders allow for 10 minutes at the beginning of the meeting
- The Chair has obligations under employment law

In conclusion the training is a good instruction on how to manage a Council Meeting.

**The key issue about all the training was that the world of Local Government is totally different to the business world.**

Finally, I have copies of the presentations if any councillor would like them, however, I would suggest that when the next opportunity for training occurs that councillor's should take it. Hopefully future training will be in person rather than the sterile singular environment of a Zoom meeting. You will meet other councillors and network with them over coffee (or tea) and biscuits and that is invaluable to both parties.