



Cherwell

DISTRICT COUNCIL
NORTH OXFORDSHIRE

Parish Engagement
Overview and Scrutiny Committee Report
March 2022

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1.0 Membership of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Councillor Tom Wallis (Chairman)	Councillor Douglas Webb (Vice-Chairman)
Councillor Mike Bishop	Councillor Sandy Dallimore
Councillor Matt Hodgson	Councillor Simon Holland
Councillor David Hughes	Councillor Ian Middleton
Councillor Perran Moon	Councillor Adam Nell
Councillor Les Sibley	Councillor Bryn Williams

Membership of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee Parish Working Group

Councillor Sandy Dallimore	Councillor David Hughes
Councillor Bryn Williams	Councillor Tim Hallchurch
Councillor Kieron Mallon	

Councillor Andrew McHugh had a standing invite to this review as Executive Lead Member whose portfolio the review scope sits within.

2.0 Acknowledgements

The Committee would like to thank Kevin Larner, Healthy Communities Manager for his contribution to the Parish Working Group

3.0 Executive Summary & Recommendation

- 3.1 The Parish Working Group (PWG) review looked at the working relationship between Cherwell District Council (CDC) and Parishes within the District. It started to map the various interactions, highlighting areas that work well and where there may be areas for improvement in the relationship and working practices.
- 3.2 The first meeting of the Working Group was on 7 January 2022 with a subsequent meeting on 26 January 2022. Due to time constraints with the review starting late in the municipal year, whilst mapping and preliminary work has been undertaken, it has not been possible to undertake a deep dive review of areas of potential improvement. As a result, the PWG is recommending that the review continue in 2022/23 to enable the areas it has identified for further work, as set out below, to be completed.
- 3.3 The PWG has liaised with a few parishes and a notification was put in the Parish Bulletin that the review was taking place. From information received so far, it has been ascertained that, in general, there is a good working relationship between District and Parish. The PWG consider that a full survey of Parishes within Cherwell should be undertaken as this would identify more accurately the feelings of Parish Councils and highlight areas for possible research.
- 3.4 When discussing areas for review, the PWG agreed that larger towns and parishes had a different relationship with the District Council than smaller parishes. It was agreed that three meetings should be arranged with the different sized parishes. One being for small parishes, one for medium sized and a third for the three large parishes of Banbury, Bicester, and Kidlington to discuss their interactions with the District Council.
- 3.5 It was also agreed that it would be beneficial for a two Parish Clerks to be extended a standing invitation to the Working Group to ensure that ideas and views from the parish perspective were represented.
- 3.6 One area brought to the attention of the Working Group was that better communication was required between council departments and district councillors, in particular to support district councillors in their interaction with parishes in their ward, including attending parish council meetings. It was agreed that a mapping exercise of all current interactions between the district and parishes be undertaken covering both statutory/formalised and more general.
- 3.7 Our recommendations:**
- (1) That the Overview and Scrutiny Committee agree to continue the work of the Parish Working Group in 2022/2023.

- (2) The 2022/2023 Working Group should submit a scoping document (Terms of Reference) to the May/July Overview & Scrutiny Committee meeting which should incorporate the areas set out below with a view to extending the good working relationship between District and Parish Councils and seeking to find solutions where any discord is found.
- Further clarity and work on Statutory roles, responsibilities and interactions
 - Feedback to be invited from Parishes via the Parish Bulletin
 - A Consultation with Customer Services re signposting should take place
 - Provision of information to ward councillors regarding parishes in their ward
 - Survey of Parishes to ascertain parish views on their interactions with the district
 - Organise three meetings with Parishes (large, medium and small)
 - Investigate legal interactions and IT Interaction/integration
 - Invite 2 parish clerks to join the group

Councillor Sandy Dallimore, Chairman of the Overview and Scrutiny Parish Working Group.

4.0 Introduction

- 4.1 At the November meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee, a scoping document (appendix 1) for a review of the relationship between Cherwell District Council and the Parishes within the district was agreed by the Committee.
- 4.2 Councillor Dallimore had brought the topic to the attention of the Committee and along with Councillors Hughes and Williams formed a working group. An invitation was sent to all non-executive members of the council to join the working group and Councillors Mallon and Hallchurch came forward and agreed to join.
- 4.3 Kevin Larner, Healthy Communities Manager had also been contacted by Councillor Dallimore and also agreed to be involved in the work of the group.
- 4.4 Councillor Andrew McHugh, Lead Member for Health and Wellbeing was also given a standing invitation to meetings of the group.

5.0 Objectives of the review

- 5.1 CDC and parishes in the district interact in many ways. The review would look at the working relationship between CDC and parishes in the district. It would map the various interactions highlighting areas that worked well and where there may be areas for improvement in the relationship and working practices.

- 5.2 The Working Group also wanted to establish the perspective of the parish councils and sought to consult all of the parishes within the district. Consultation would take place firstly by way of survey and also through meetings with groups of large, medium, and small parishes. The Working Group also agreed that two parish clerks would be encouraged to join the work of the group.
- 5.3 The group agreed that their work should continue in the 2022/23 municipal year with some work ongoing and other work being rolled into next year. New members would be invited when considered by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

6.0 Context and Background Information

- 6.1 Within Oxfordshire there is a three tier system of local government: county; districts and city council; and town/parish councils.
- 6.2 Each tier/local authority is responsible for delivering different services:

County – Responsible for services across the whole of the County including:

- Education
- Transport
- Planning
- Fire and public safety
- Social care
- Libraries
- Waste management
- Trading standards

District – Responsible for services across the whole District including:

- Rubbish collection
- Recycling
- Council Tax collections
- Housing
- Planning applications
- Elections

Parish – Responsible for local issues including:

- Allotments
- Public clocks
- Bus shelters
- Community centres

- Play areas and play equipment
- Grants to help local organisations
- Consultation on neighbourhood planning

They also have the power to issue fixed penalty fines for

- Litter
- Graffiti
- Fly posting
- Dog offences

6.4 The District Council provides support to Parish Councils but support is also available through the National Association of Local Councils (NALC), Oxfordshire Association of Local Councils (OALC) and the Society of Local Council Clerks (SLCC) which provide training for clerks and a high level of support. It is highly recommended that all clerks join at least one of these associations.

6.5 The district council has a statutory responsibility to monitor vacancies and run elections for parish councils. The district council is responsible for carrying out community governance reviews.

6.6 The Monitoring Officer is responsible for providing support in upholding the Code of Conduct of Councillors, and maintains a record of all parish councillors Register of Interests, which are published on the district council website.

6.7 CDC Planning department consults with parish councils.

6.8 The Wellbeing Team run Parish Liaison Meetings and send regular communications to each parish clerk.