

## PARISH CONFERENCE

TUESDAY, 22 MARCH 2016

PRESENT: Councillor Christine Bateson (Chairman) and Derek Wilson

Also in attendance: Sandra Baker, John Birkett, David Burfitt, Chris Graham, Katy Jones, Keith Robinson, Jo Stickland, Barbara Story and Des Warren.

Officers: Harjit Hunjan, Jacqui Hurd, Jenifer Jackson, Shilpa Manek, Kevin Mist, David Scott and Ben Smith.

### WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS

The Chairman welcomed everyone to the meeting and conducted around the table introductions.

### APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Stretton, Bob Austin, Mandy Brar, Mary Cooper, Andrew Davies, Jane Dawson, Susan Ground, Fiona Hewer, Diane Hughes, Margaret Lenton, Mandy Robson-Brown, Tony Troughton, Horton Parish Council and Sunningdale Parish Council.

### MINUTES FROM LAST CONFERENCE

Clerk to listen to audio recording of last meeting and put more detail in the 'Transport in Rural Areas' section and then clear with Chairman.

### ELECTION EXPENSES

David Scott, Head of Governance, Partnerships, Performance and Policy, reported that the update would be on election costs and not expenses. David Scott explained that it was very complex and would try and explain. David Scott informed the Conference Members that two very specific concerns had been raised and cleared.

David Scott explained that the 2015 elections were a set of combined election, the largest in a number of years. It was a very busy election with votes given for general, parish councils and local. Information and estimates were provided to Parish Councils explaining that these would vary.

David Scott provided information on the eight elements that build up the figures. These are as follows:

1. Nominations and nomination packs  
Charge for a number of nominations received actually.
2. Contribution of returning officer and deputy costs  
Fees for both officers.
3. Premises and Equipment  
Portioned to reflect the share. Cost spread with other elections on a third basis or a nominal basis, including the variation. The printing of ballot papers was significantly higher. Normally there would be a 60% turnout but in 2015, there was a 90% turnout.

4. Poll cards including postal  
Portioned across the three the three elements. In 2011, Parish Councils had not been charged compared to in 2015. However, these costs were not recharged to Parish Councils.
5. Postal Vote Cards  
There were a high level of these plus printing, postal costs and return costs. There were 104,000 in total, which was a 85% return rate. Other points included that:
  - Recharge of cost of dealing with returns.
  - Have to scrutinise 100% of returned votes, incorrect dates and signatures rejected.
  - It was decided not to print all of the postal votes for Parish Councils. It was better to only print the contested elections. There were only five Parish Councils with contested elections.
6. Polling station staffing costs (Presiding Officer and Poll Clerks)  
There were a higher amount of staff than in 2011, it was a more complex election to run. There was more training for staff. The government is very clear of what can be claimed for with the general elections and there was a tight scrutiny of accounts, that were signed off by government once approved.
7. Verification and count costs  
This was the largest cost. Firstly the general election is verified and counted which was a very lengthy process. Since the verification and counting was completed over two days, this lead to double costs. One Parish Council took over nine hours to count.
8. Nominal contribution to office administration  
This was put towards Parish Councils.

The three main points that differed between 2011 an 2015 were as follows:

- Poll Cards – Parish Councils not charged in 2011.
- Incoming costs of postal votes - Parish Councils not charged in 2011.
- Verification and counting costs – two nights instead of one.

Points highlighted by Conference Members included:

- Bray and Holyport had similar levels as there were more candidates resulting in three ballot papers.
- Comparison of cost of general to bi election – in 2014, there were two lots of bi elections for Holyport and Wraysbury therefore the 2014 costs were less than 2015, however higher than 2011.
- Waltham St Lawrence would like to know how estimated figures are then the actual figures.

**ACTION: David Scott to report back**

- Sandra Baker asked that if there were only two elections, then surely the costs would go down. David Scott explained that the venue and duration costs would be reduced if just borough and Parish Council elections.
- The Chairman asked who would be paying for the Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC) Election in May 2016. David Scott explained that the borough received a Maximum Recoverable Amount (MRA) from government. There would be a centralised count for the PCC Elections. There was only one election and no cross boundary confusion. This would be a Thames Valley count so the borough would only be verifying the votes and then sending them all to Abingdon where all the votes would be counted, centrally.
- The Chairman asked about the referendum costs. David Scott explained that since it was in different regions, they were counted locally at the Magnet and then the results would be fed in to Southampton to the regional officer.

Cllrs Mrs Bateson and those attending the Conference thanked David Scott for the very comprehensive explanation of the election cost arrangements and the clarity the explanation had provided.

## UPDATE ON DELIVERING DIFFERENTLY IN NEIGHBOURHOODS

Ben Smith, Head of Highways and Transport, gave an update to the Conference. Ben Smith advised that Dave Perkins was leading on this project but had left the borough. The project had started in 2015 and the borough had worked with DCLG on a pilot study. The outcome was that a case study document had been produced highlighting the key actions and concluding that the borough does more on a national level.

**ACTION: Attach study document to minutes and publish report on stakeholder events.**

The three key actions were:

- Concerns and engagements – contact and information finding – next agenda item will cover.
- Procurement and procuring contracts.
- Analysis of spend – investing money locally.

### Procurement and procuring contracts

Highways were currently procuring, engagement with a Parish procurement contract. Cox Green Parish Council were working alongside the borough to assist in choosing the correct contract. The Parish Council would take part in the evaluation process once the tender bids were back and help in the selection process.

The borough would like to work with other Parish Councils to influence where the spent is, how it is prioritised and what the borough does with the funds.

Ben Smith asked Parish Councils to nominate themselves to get involved. The Chairman suggested that three Parish Councils should participate.

Bray Parish Council nominated themselves.

The Conference wanted to know the big picture for delivering differently. Ben Smith pointed out that the team would like to draw together lessons learnt and embed then in to national policy.

**ACTION: Ben Smith to confirm the next steps to the Conference.**

Datchet Parish Council nominated themselves.

## CONTACTING THE COUNCIL

Jacqui Hurd, Head of Customer Services, updated the Conference on the procedures for contacting the council. Jacqui Hurd explained that the biggest frustration was that 'nobody was getting back to me'. There are a number of projects going on currently. These include:

- Main channel by phone and email and complaints officer too. In the process of gathering evidence and then analysing what the queries were so analysing why officers were not getting back to answer queries.
- The Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead is a lean borough. Information from the Parish Councils to planning, steps had been put into place. A VIP Call number for Parish Councils only, not for the public for all urgent enquiries was distributed at the Conference. The line was going to be open from 8am to 6pm currently and 8am to 7pm from June 2016. All calls would get through, logged and dealt with. A management team number was also provided. Email id's were also included.

**ACTION: Provide information card with all contacts provided electronically.**

- Lagging – signed contracts with Jadu, starting 1 May 2016 where customers would be able to set up their own accounts. The first function available for customers would be ordering green waste, the process will be able to be tracked. The same functions for Members would be available by the end of the year. Jacqui Hurd informed the Conference that volunteers were being looked for.
- Customer insight – what's going on in their ward/parish/area. The borough were looking for an insight of what local people are concerned about.
- Telephony System – this was currently out to tender and a decision would be made at the end of June 2016. This would offer the functionality of visibility of what officers were doing. Jacqui Hurd suggest attending a future conference to report back on this.

Points raised by Conference Members included:

- The Parish Councils would like distribution charts to see who does what.

**ACTION: Provide distribution charts to all Parish Councils.**

- If Parish Councils already have contacts who they have been working with in the council, should they now only use the team email. Jacqui Hurd explained that it would be better to use the team emails as these would be logged. If other contacts were used and no one responded to a query, then it would not be able to be tracked. The preferred route would be the central route as it could be tracked.
- What was the standard turnaround time for responding to enquiries. Jacqui Hurd explained that there were no written contract with standard turnaround periods, however, ten working days was a general standard. If no response was received within five working days, it would be worth chasing again.
- Parish Councils and Members would like to know of outcomes of consultations before actions taken forward, this would assist them to inform the public if asked. Ben Smith explained that outcomes were put on the website.

**ACTION: Ben Smith to ensure that Members and Parish Councils are initially informed of consultation outcomes.**

The Chairman requested that Jacqui Hurd updates the Conference in six months.

**ACTION: Clerk to note.**

## PLANNING PRESENTATION

Jenifer Jackson provided a presentation on planning, S106 and CIL.

**ACTION: Presentation to be sent to all Parish Councils by Sandra Baker, DALC.**

Questions asked by Conference Members included:

- Why we were moving to CIL, answered in presentation.
- Viability Report – the viability report is an across the borough, not per development or site specific.
- Currently using CIL and S106, could the planning manager explain why both are used. Jenifer Jackson explained that CIL cannot be used now and the only option is S106, when it is in place, all will only use S106. Currently S106 is only used for particular schemes.
- It was confirmed that any planning permitted in the borough would have to pay under CIL.
- Who decides what the CIL funds are spent on. Jenifer Jackson advised that governance was not in place yet so it was the Cabinet who decided.
- The Reg. 123 list can be added to or changed at any time.
- We are still awaiting the examiners response. No decisions would be made until the Tandridge Council challenge decisions were made. A decision should be reached by May 2016.

Jenifer Jackson updated the Conference on the devolution on planning powers to Parish Councils. Parish Councils, such as Brae Parish Council would be a sub committee to

Maidenhead development control panel. Brae Parish Council would consider determining housing applications first unless called in. however, the planning department were still working on the practicalities.

White Waltham Parish Council were not contacted and would be interested to participate.

**ACTION: Jenifer Jackson to investigate and report back to Members.**

DALC thanked all officers for there hard work.

ITEMS FOR FUTURE MEETINGS

Parish Conference Members reminded to contact DALC, Sandra Baker or Chris Graham to suggest items for future meetings. DALC suggested that it would be interesting to hear examples of work carried out with the borough.

DATES OF NEXT CONFERENCE

Dates of the next Conference was noted by Members.

The meeting, which began at 7.00 pm, finished at 9.00 pm

CHAIRMAN.....

DATE.....