

Final Report of the Project Team to the Review Committee

Parish Liaison Review



PARISH LIAISON REVIEW

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2 Glossary

DC	District Council

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3 Introduction

The Review was instigated at the request of the Rochford and Rawreth Parish Clerks who had heard about similar types of meetings arranged by other District Councils. Following the Review Committees agreement to investigate their request another two requests for this type of meeting were received from Hockley and Ashingdon Parish Clerks.

4 Terms of reference

- 4.1 To investigate a request from Rochford and Rawreth Parish Clerks for the setting up of Parish/Town liaison meetings between an Officer of the Authority and the Parish/Town Clerks.
- 4.2 To identify what purpose the meetings would serve and to identify best practices at other authorities that could be introduced at Rochford District Council.

5 Methodology

- 5.1 A meeting was arranged with the Parish Clerk from Rochford Parish Council who had made the request to the Review Committee to gain further detailed information on its nature, including the details of any other Authorities that they knew that provides this service.
- 5.2 Contact was made with Braintree District Council (one of the Authorities identified as providing the service for its parishes) and copies of the agendas and minutes from their meetings were obtained. These documents were used to ascertain the benefits to both parties and what topics were covered at the meetings.
- 5.3 The other Parish/Town Council Clerks in the District were canvassed to obtain their views on the benefits of meetings and to ascertain if they were interested in the concept and what their needs would be.

6 Findings

6.1 From Initial Meeting with Parish Clerks

6.1.1 The meeting with the Parish Clerks took place on the 30 July 2008 at Rochford Parish Rooms with the Clerks from Ashingdon, Hockley and Rochford Parish Councils.

6.1.2 The Clerks indicated that they felt the liaison meetings could:-

- Cover procedures and issues
- Allow the Clerks to get to better know officers
- Allow ideas to be swapped informally before formal policy was made.
- Allow knowledge to be developed and Clerks to draw on the expertise of DC officers
- Be a forum for networking and discussion of issues such as constitution questions and finding out what is going on.
- Allow DC officers to advise of any major personnel changes at the District Council.

6.1.3 The Parish Clerks that attended the meeting agreed that they would prefer a network forum with District Council officer's participation on a quarterly basis.

6.1.4 In terms of specifics the parish attendees were asked if there were any issues that they would like to see on the agenda, if the meeting was to be held, say, in a fortnights time. The clerks were unable to provide details of any urgent issues that could not be dealt with by other means.

6.2 From another Local Authority

- 6.2.1 Braintree District Council covers 54 parishes and has set up a Parish and Town Clerks' network which meets half yearly. The network had its first meeting in February 2007 and had 17 clerks attend representing 19 Parish Councils. At the second meeting in February 2008 11 clerks attended, representing 13 Parish Councils.
- 6.2.2 Braintree District Council has a dedicated Parish Liaison Officer to organise these meetings, produce a newsletter, visit new Parish Clerks and be involved with their Parish Cluster meetings.
- 6.2.3 Meetings have covered topics such as local elections, Members Code of Conduct and the work of Neighbourhood Policing and Neighbourhood Action Panels.
- 6.2.4 Two other Essex Local Authorities were contacted who provide liaison meetings for their Parish Clerks but neither responded to the request.

6.3 From Canvassing the other Parish / Town Council Clerks

- 6.3.1 The clerks of the remaining Parish /Town Councils were contacted to see if they would attend meetings if organised and what issues they would wish to see on the Agenda. Of the other ten clerks, three indicated that they would like to attend a meeting if organised. Of the other Clerks one said they would not attend, one was a maybe, one referred the matter to the Parish Council and the other four did not respond.
- 6.3.2 Only one had any urgent issues that they needed the District Council to deal with and these could be better dealt with by the existing Member meetings. One Clerk stated that if they had an urgent issue they would contact the relevant officer at the District Council, or other Parish Clerks, directly and would not wish liaison meetings to be set up for this purpose.
- 6.3.3 It has been indicated that the issues facing the Parish / Town Clerks are different in each locality and therefore it would usually be preferable to discuss problems direct with the District Council without other Parish Clerks becoming unnecessarily involved and potentially confused.
- 6.3.4 Mention has been made of the fact that Members who are both Parish/Town and District Councillors are often able to clarify matters between the Parish/Town and District Councils.

7 Conclusion

- 7.1 Whilst the team could see the benefits to the Parish Clerks of regular meetings for net working purposes and to broaden their knowledge, they did not feel that the District Council was the right point of focus.
- 7.2 The example that was mentioned to the team and which they gathered information about was of Braintree District Council. This Authority has forty more Parish Councils within its District than Rochford District Council so the benefits of liaison meetings are more pronounced.
- 7.3 The team felt that there are already enough Member level meetings involving the Parish Councils and the District Council and, therefore, one for Clerks and Officers where quite often the same information would be discussed would confuse matters rather than clarify them.
- 7.4 It was felt that it could be more appropriate for the clerks to meet as a sub group through, say, the auspices of the Rochford Hundred Association of Local Councils or the Essex Association of Local Councils.

8 Recommendations

Recommendation No 1

- 8.1 In view of the teams findings it was not felt that the requests from the Parish Clerks can be supported. This does not mean that individual meetings could not be arranged with the Parish/Town Clerks if and when it was felt necessary.

It is recommended to the Review Committee that the initial requests for Parish Liaison meetings from the Rochford and Rawreth Parish Clerks be declined.

- 8.2 Whilst the team did not see any benefit to the District Council in arranging Parish Liaison meetings, they could see that there would be benefit to the Parish Clerks. The team therefore felt that it would be worth the Clerks meeting in some form.

It is recommended to the Review Committee that the Clerks could meet as a sub group under the auspices of the Rochford Hundred Association of Local Councils and Members.