

## **SCRUTINY COMMISSION – 20<sup>TH</sup> APRIL 2005**

### **REPORT OF THE FIVE MEMBER REVIEW PANEL WORKING WITH TOWN AND PARISH COUNCILS.**

#### **Purpose**

1. The purpose of the report is to inform the Scrutiny Commission of the conclusions and recommendations arising from the five-member Scrutiny Review Panel's investigation into current working arrangements with Town and Parish Councils.

#### **Background**

2. Following receipt of a report on the current working arrangements with Town and Parish Councils which were last reviewed in 1993, the Commission agreed to establish a five-member Scrutiny Review Panel to look again at this issue in the light of recent changes and with a view to considering how the existing relationship could be improved.

#### **Membership of the Panel**

3. Through the Political Group processes, the following members were appointed to serve on the Panel:-

Mr N. J. Brown CC  
Mr M. B. Page CC  
Professor M. E. Preston CC  
Mrs M. L. Sherwin CC  
Mr R. M. Wilson CC

Professor Preston was nominated to serve as Chairman.

#### **Terms of Reference**

4. The following terms of reference were agreed by the Scrutiny Commission and noted by the Panel.

“To consider ways of improving the relationship with Town and Parish Councils including:

- (a) the process of consultation and the provision of information;
- (b) co-ordination of services delivered by the County Council and Parish and Town Councils;
- (c) arrangements for delivering services which may be delivered by both types of authorities;
- (d) the impact of the Quality Town and Parish Council Scheme”.

### **Background Information**

- 5. The Panel considered as its starting point the Handbook and Code of Conduct which sets out the Strategy for Working with Parish and Town Councils. The Strategy was produced and agreed by the County Council in 1993.
- 6. The Panel also considered documentation produced by the ODPM on Quality Town and Parish Councils Scheme. This initiative seeks to enhance the role of parish and town councils; to develop a framework for partnership working; and to equip parish and town councils to take on a stronger role for the benefit of the local community. This should help them to work more closely with partners in the delivery of local services. Achieving quality parish status demonstrates that a council has met certain standards expected from an effective, representative and active parish council.

### **Conduct of the Review**

- 7. The Panel met four times. It decided that it would conduct the review by drawing evidence through two participative workshops.

- (a) Meeting 1 - Workshop – County Council officers who provide services to and work with Local (i.e. Parish and Town) Councils

Presentations were received from 3 departments of the County Council –Highways Transportation and Waste Management, the Community Services and Chief Executive’s.

The purpose was to identify some of the services currently provided by the County Council in which Local Councils participate, the way Local Councils are consulted, the extent to which the work of Local Councils are supported and to consider the opportunities, costs and benefits of changes to these arrangements.

(b) Meeting 2 - Workshop – Members and officers of Local Councils (including the Local Association of Local and Parish Councils)

Representatives of 2 Parish Councils and the Association of Parish and Local Councils were invited to set out how they perceived the working relationship and in particular what issues/difficulties existed.

(c) Meeting 3 – Practice in other Local Authorities/Review of Issues

The purpose of this meeting was to identify best practice in working arrangements between principal Local Authorities and Local Councils. The Panel considered comments from eight County Councils on their existing arrangements and the issues facing them in developing a working relationship with their local Councils. The Panel also considered copies of 'Charters' produced by two County Councils.

At this meeting the Panel was further advised on issues they had identified in the first two participation workshops.

(d) Meeting 4 – To consider the draft final report

8. Appendix 1 to this report sets out a list of the Parish representatives who attended the second meeting and the eight councils who provided comments on their existing arrangements

## **FINDINGS OF THE PANEL**

### **Current Working Relationships**

9. The Panel concluded that the current working arrangements for engaging with Parish/Town Councils and Parish Meetings (hereafter referred to as Parish Councils) were good. Much of what was recommended by the ODPM Model Charter and good practice identified elsewhere was already in place namely:-
- a) Parish Councils were consulted in the development and review of the Community Strategy.
  - b) Existing arrangements and some recent developments, including the pilot Roadworks Protocol, were particularly welcomed by Parish Councils;
  - c) The consultation charter provides for the involvement of Parish Councils in policy formulation. Service areas actively engage with local communities in planning service delivery e.g. consulting on library opening hours.

- d) The County Council supports community life and activity through the Leicestershire Rural Partnership and by providing grants through various means, including Shire Grants. The development of a 'funding toolkit' should further assist in this process.
- e) The County Council has recognised the value of Parish Councils and the need to develop their capacity. To that end the County Council has funded a post to support councils moving towards quality status.
- f) In developing the Better Access to Better Services Initiative the County Council has worked and continues to work with parish councils to develop a joint approach to help (information and access) points and supporting the development of Parish Websites.
- g) The County Council supports parish appraisal and plans and ensures the Parish Council is involved in them. The Council also has mechanisms in place for responding to the outcomes of such plans/approvals.

### **Recognition of the Importance of Parish Councils**

10. The Panel is of the view that the County Council needs to recognise that:

- Parish Councils, as the tier of government that is closest to local communities, have a central role to play in contributing to improving the local quality of life.
- Recent developments, including the concept of Quality Parish Councils and the five year plan published by the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister 'Sustainable Communities: People, Places and Prosperity' will enhance the role of Parish Councils and equip them to take on a stronger role in contributing to the long term vision and priorities for their area. The County Council should, through the Association of Parish and Local Councils (APLC) continue to, support Parishes wishing to seek Quality Parish Status. Currently 2 Parish Councils have achieved Quality Status. A further 12 working towards this and 4 have indicated an interest in seeking quality status. These are listed in Appendix 1.
- The diversity, particularly in size and resources, is an important factor. Appendix 3 to this report lists all the Parish Councils in Leicestershire and includes information on population and their precept levels. As can be seen the vast majority of Parish Councils are small and have limited resources. A further group of Parish Councils could be deemed to be of medium size and approximately 14 could be classed as larger Parish Councils (population in excess of 6000 or budgets in

excess of £250,000). It would be the larger Parish Councils and certain medium size parish councils who might be better able to cope with the demands being placed upon them as well as consider possible delegation.

### **Future Action - Developing a Charter/Protocol**

10. The Panel considers that:

- a) The Strategy for working with Town and Parish Councils (Handbook and Code of Practice) produced in January 1994 should be updated. The Model Charter set out in the ODPM publication 'The Quality Parish and Town Council Scheme' (June 2003) and the charter produced by South Gloucestershire were considered to be a useful starting basis. The APLC should be involved in the review. There would be benefit in working with District Councils in developing some aspects of the Charter or agreeing a Joint Charter. In this regard it was noted that discussions are currently underway at officer level involving the County Council, all District Councils and the APLC with a view to seeking ways of improving communication and working between the different tiers of local government (see paragraph 12 (a));
- b) The updated Strategy should be relaunched to all Parish Councils and within the County Council;
- c) Linked to the relaunch of the updated Strategy, the County Council should seek to identify a contact officer, possibly one for parishes in each district area. Most County Councillors attend Town and Parish Council meetings on their patch. Currently no formal mechanism exists for members to feed back on issues raised nor to be briefed on issues to be discussed at meetings. The contact officers could play a role in briefing members;
- d) A bi-annual review/update of the Strategy and contact details should take place linked to the annual meeting between the County Council and Parish Councils. The recent decision of the Leader of the Council to include Scrutiny Spokesmen in the Annual Meeting with Parish Councils was welcomed.

### **Possible Annexes to the Charter/Protocol**

11. The Panel is of the view that the Charter would benefit from the inclusion of separate annexes which set out information covering the following for the reasons specified:-

a) Services provided by the Council

The services provided by the County Council should be listed. It was noted that a joint A to Z of County and District Council services is being progressed and the Panel was of the view that this should be encouraged and supported. It should also identify potential opportunities for joint working and list examples of good practice and joint working arrangements. This would assist Parish Councils, particularly the smaller ones.

b) Section 106

A brief Statement outlining the Section 106 process. This would need to be developed with District Councils who normally take the lead in Section 106 agreements.

The Panel is also of the view that Parish Councils should be involved more closely in the process of securing developer contributions (Section 106 Agreements). Parishes are too often consulted at the end of the process and the Panel members are of the view their earlier involvement (not just consultation) would improve the process and enable Parish Councils to contribute to the content of Section 106 agreements.

c) Commenting on Planning Matters

On planning matters the Panel noted that the Council has good mechanisms in place to consult the relevant Parish Councils. However, given the complexities of the planning regime, there would be merit in exploring the possibility of providing a checklist of issues the Parish might wish to consider and comment upon (in the majority of cases to District Councils). In addition the County Council, District Councils and the APLC should consider the merits of providing joint training events for Parish Clerks to supplement the advice in the checklist.

d) Crime and Anti-Social Behaviour

The issue of Crime and Anti Social behaviour is a particular concern. An annexe to the protocol could usefully include a statement setting out the role of District Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnerships and how Parish Councils could engage with such Partnerships in addressing local concerns and how Parishes might be supported in any initiatives they may wish to pursue. The recent increased investment from the County Council and District Councils for Community Support Officers would be of particular interest to Parish Councils and should be specifically addressed in the Annexe.

e) BABSI

The County Council's Better Access to Better Services Initiative offers particular opportunities for engaging with Parish Councils. For the County Council there is an opportunity to consider joint provision of help points in village halls or other premises owned or managed by a Parish Council.

f) Accessing Funding

The work currently being undertaken on developing a 'funding toolkit' could usefully be added to the protocol. It was noted that the toolkit would be regularly updated to have regard to any new funding streams as well as signposting potential applicants to specialist officers within the County Council and other partners/organisations who may be able to provide further advice and guidance.

g) County Councillors

County Councillors play an important role in supporting parish councils. An annexe should be included which sets out the names of each Councillor and the parishes within their electoral division. This would not only assist the Parish Council but also officers within the County Council who would be able to keep members informed of developments in their area under the sensitive issues procedure.

### **Supporting Parishes and Town Councils**

13. The Panel recognised that the work of parish/town councils is heavily dependent on volunteers and many did not have a full time clerk. It therefore suggests that:-

- There may be merit in the County Council, District Councils and other statutory partners working through the APLC to review the existing support and its appropriateness to small Parish Councils and Parish Meetings. In this regard particular consideration should be given to amongst other things providing a clerking advisory service.
- The new Consultation Standards should recognise the particular problems faced by smaller Parishes with limited resources. In this regard it was noted that the new Consultation Standards would be recommending that, where possible, there should be a twelve week time limit for consultation responses. The Standards would also be suggesting that the possibility of joint consultation with District Councils and other statutory partners should also be explored so as to avoid consultation overload.

- Increasingly communications between the County Council, the APLC and a significant number of Parish Councils is done electronically via the APLC Website. Such an arrangement has significant attractions in terms of communication and efficiency (i.e. reduced printing and postage). However, as not all Parish Councils have access to computers, it is still necessary to circulate paper copies. The Panel is of the view that there would be considerable merit in an audit being undertaken to identify
  - the number of Parish Councils without access to computers and to discuss with other statutory partners possible ways of assisting Parish Council obtaining and operating such equipment.
  - the capacity within the various Parish Councils and, in particular, whether the Parish Council operates from a base which might lend itself to be used by the County Council or other agency for joint information provision or service delivery.

### **Recommendation**

14. The Scrutiny Commission is asked to consider and endorse the conclusions of its five member Panel for submission to the Cabinet.

**PROFESSOR M. E. PRESTON CC**  
**Chairman of the Review Panel.**

### **Background Papers**

'In Partnership' – A Strategy for Working with Parish and Town Councils - Handbook and Code of Practice

Leicestershire Rural Partnership – 2004/05 Action Plan

The Quality Parish and Town Council Scheme: The Quality Scheme Explained. (Available on the websites of the ODPM, Defra and The Countryside Agency)

BABSI Access Strategy

Draft Communication and Consultation Standards



## **APPENDIX 1**

### **MEETING WITH PARISH COUNCIL REPRESENTATIVES**

Mr R. Simpson – Leicestershire Association of Parish Councils

Mr I. Laughton – Clerk – Braunstone Town Council

Mrs J. Johnson – Clerk – Somerby Parish Council

Mr D. Vurley – Chairman – Somerby Parish Council

### **INFORMATION RECEIVED FROM THE FOLLOWING COUNCILS**

Cornwall County Council

East Sussex County Council

Gloucestershire County Council

Lancashire County Council

Oxfordshire County Council

Staffordshire County Council

West Sussex County Council

Worcestershire County Council

**TOWN AND PARISH COUNCILS**

**WITH QUALITY STATUS**

Asfordby Parish Council

Braunstone Town Council

**WORKING TOWARDS QUALITY STATUS**

Whetstone Parish Council

Sapcote Parish Council

Sileby Parish Council

Newtown Linford Parish Council

Thurmaston Parish Council

Lutterworth Town Council

Packington Parish Council

Ashby Woulds Town Council

Syston Town Council

Ashby de la Zouch Town Council

Waltham on the Wolds Parish Council

Blaby Parish Council

**COUNCILS INTERESTED IN QUALITY STATUS**

Great Glen Parish Council

Long Whatton Parish Council

Uppingham Town Council

Wyndham & Edmonthorpe Parish Council

## APPENDIX 3

### TOWN AND PARISH COUNCIL

### ELECTORAL ROLL AND PRECEPT LEVELS

Council Name	Precept	Electoral roll
Ab Kettleby Parish Council	3,750	437
Anstey Parish Council	110,340	4628
Appleby Magna Parish Council	10,500	896
Arnesby Parish Council	2,650	275
Asfordby Parish Council	62,995	2541
Ashby de la Zouch Town Council	270,780	10458
Ashby Magna Parish Council	3,000	
Ashby Parva Parish Meeting		194
Ashby Woulds Parish Council	59,735	3868
Ashwell Parish Council	2,400	228
Bagworth & Thornton Parish Council	40,000	1600
Barkby & Barkby Thorpe Parish Council	3,000	283
Barkstone, Plungar & Redmile Parish Council	7,500	687
Barlestone Parish Council	45,000	1876
Barrow-Upon-Soar Parish Council	71,490	4136
Belton in Rutland Parish Council	3,700	269
Belton Parish Council	5,750	600
Belvoir Parish Council	4,945	250
Billesdon Parish Council	9,500	655
Birstall Parish Council	283,850	11500
Bitteswell Parish Council	8,550	342
Blaby Parish Council	122,068	4933
Bottesford & Muston Parish Council	37,260	3750
Braunston in Rutland Parish Council	6,000	310
Braunstone Town Council	361,695	12040
Breedon on the Hill Parish Council	10,000	796
Broughton Astley Parish Council	190,000	6426
Buckminster Parish Council	4,170	289
Burbage Parish Council	287,040	11946
Burton & Dalby Parish Council	10,500	750

Burton on the Wolds, Cotes & Prestwold P C	10,000	877
Burton Overy Parish Council		236
Cadeby Parish Council	1,350	160
Carlton Parish Council	4,800	258
Castle Donington Parish Council	109,936	4773
Charley Parish Council	1,500	99
Clawson Hose & Harby Parish Council	30,354	1915
Clipsham Parish Meeting		101
Coleorton Parish Council	12,000	813
Cosby Parish Council	85,000	2796
Cossington Parish Council	8,000	404
Cotesbach Parish Council	650	171
Cottesmore Parish Council	21,685	1600
Countesthorpe Parish Council	152,947	5175
Croft Parish Council	20,000	800
Croxton Kerrial & Branston Parish Council	3,750	398
Desford Parish Council	46,000	3093
Drayton, Bringham & Nevill Holt Parish Meeting	1,820	
Dunton Bassett Parish Council		636
Earl Shilton Town Council	111,000	7159
East Langton Parish Council	700	273
Eaton & Eastwell Parish Council	7,000	343
Ellistown & Battleflat Parish Council	37,600	1874
Empingham Parish Council		744
Enderby Parish Council	90,000	4618
Essendine Parish Council	2,390	281
Exton Parish Council	3,400	473
Fleckney Parish Council	54,600	3568
Foxton Parish Council	5,000	372
Freeby Parish Council	1,100	46
Frisby & Kirkby Parish Council	13,500	700
Frolesworth Parish Meeting	713	170
Gaddesby Parish Council	11,500	622
Gilmorton Parish Council	6,800	717
Glen Parva Parish Council	110,000	4250
Glenfield Parish Council	185,500	7916
Great Bowden Parish Council	14,400	794
Great Casterton Parish Council	3,000	350

Great Glen Parish Council		2720
Grimston, Saxelby & Shoby Parish Council	4,000	239
Groby Parish Council	99,020	5875
Hallaton Parish Council	7,613	400
Heather Parish Council	9,000	783
Higham on the Hill Parish Council	7,000	593
Hoby, Rotherby, Ragdale & Brooksby Parish Council	7,400	480
Hoton Parish Council	4,500	295
Houghton on the Hill Parish Council	12,000	1223
Huncote Parish Council	26,500	1370
Hungarton Parish Council	3,500	
Husbands Bosworth Parish Council	13,000	796
Ibstock Parish Council	99,950	4746
Isley-Cum-Langley Parish Meeting	505	72
Kegworth Parish Council	70,890	2688
Ketton Parish Council	15,000	1459
Keyham Parish Meeting	1720	100
Kibworth Beauchamp Parish Council	55000	3076
Kibworth Harcourt Parish Council		822
Kimcote & Walton Parish Council	7450	450
Kirby Muxloe Parish Council	59,000	3705
Langham Parish Council	10,000	995
Laughton Parish Meeting		68
Leicester Forest East Parish Council	61,000	4911
Leire Parish Council	5,000	448
Lockington & Hemington Parish Council	8,000	141
Long Whatton & Diseworth Parish Council	12,000	1370
Lubenham Parish Council	11,000	804
Lutterworth Town Council	219,760	7053
Market Bosworth Parish Council	23,500	1682
Market Overton Parish Council	5,815	404
Markfield Parish Council	69,778	5000
Measham Parish Council	87,920	3793
Medbourne Parish Council	4,178	381
Misterton with Walcote Parish Council	6,000	364
Morcott Parish Council	2,700	280
Mountsorrel Parish Council	153,500	6107
Mowsley Parish Meeting	1410	188

Nailstone Parish Council	6,293	440
Narborough Parish Council	132,000	6459
Nether Broughton & Old Dalby Parish Council	9,500	1092
Newbold Verdon Parish Council		2592
Newtown Linford Parish Council	28,000	841
North Kilworth Parish Council	10,000	414
North Luffenham Parish Council	4,800	571
Oakham Town Council		7964
Oakthorpe, Donisthorpe & Acreford Parish Council		1946
Osbaston Parish Council	2,000	230
Packington Parish Council	19,000	642
Peatling Magna Parish Meeting	1,120	
Peckleton Parish Council	12000	800
Preston Parish Meeting	1200	143
Queniborough Parish Council	28560	1903
Quorndon Parish Council	124500	5000+
Ratby Parish Council	58,300	3163
Ratcliffe on the Wreake Parish Meeting		142
Rearsby Parish Council	15,123	850
Ridlington Parish Council	770	155
Rothley Parish Council	86,000	2990
Ryhall Parish Council		1392
Sapcote Parish Council	29,344	2042
Scalford Parish Council	7,500	508
Scraptoft Parish Council	1,200	1593
Seagrave Parish Council	11,290	408
Seaton Parish Council	2,100	151
Shackerstone Parish Council	15,500	611
Sharnford Parish Council	11.000	808
Shawell Parish Meeting	800	121
Shearsby Parish Meeting	2700	
Shepshed Town Council	269,759	10330
Sileby Parish Council	115,583	5716
Skeffington Parish Meeting	400	150
Smeeton Westerby Parish Council	1,978	288
Somerby Parish Council	22,190	662
South Croxton Parish Council	5,400	195
South Kilworth Parish Council	9,722	345

South Luffenham Parish Council	3,500	371
Sproxtton Parish Council	3,000	161
Stanton under Bardon Parish Council	6,798	518
Stathern Parish Council	7,500	539
Stoke Golding Parish Council		1340
Stoney Stanton Parish Council	44,000	4000
Stoughton Parish Council	6,402	251
Stretton Parish Council	1,700	256
Sutton Cheney Parish Council	9,000	424
Swannington Parish Council	15,000	965
Swinford Parish Council	5,000	364
Swithland Parish Meeting	3500	187
Syston Town Council	255,662	9221
Theddingworth Parish Council	1,980	192
Thorpe Langton Parish Meeting		112
Thrussington Parish Council		460
Thurcaston & Cropston Parish Council	32,000	1707
Thurlaston Parish Council	10,000	583
Thurmaston Parish Council	208,000	8000
Thurnby & Bushby Parish Council	20,000	2600
Tilton on the Hill Parish Council	7,000	451
Tinwell Parish Meeting		
Tugby & Keythorpe Parish Council	7,000	300
Tur Langton Parish Council	1,000	137
Twycross Parish Council	3,200	400
Twyford & Thorpe Satchville Parish Council	5,000	503
Ullesthorpe Parish Council	3,750	697
Uppingham Town Council	58,583	4200
Wanlip Parish Meeting	500	143
Whetstone Parish Council	163,576	4563
Whissendine Parish Council	11,000	972
Willoughby Waterleys Parish Council	4,000	216
Wing Parish Council	4,500	291
Wistow & Newton Parish Meeting	1,166	208
Witherley Parish Council	10,750	627
Woodhouse Parish Council	36,800	1619
Worthington Parish Council		
Wyndham & Edmondthorpe Parish Council	9,100	487

