

SUMMARY OF RESPONSES TO THE QUESTIONNAIRE FOR PARISH COUNCILS from the Standards Committee's Parish Liaison Working Group

General:

Parish / Community Council responses: 27 of 90 parish councils, 0 of 1 community council

Total number of Councillors:

- 5 – 2 councils
- 7 – 6 councils
- 8 – 1 council
- 9 – 9 councils
- 11 – 5 councils
- 13 – 2 councils
- 15 – 2 councils

Number of current vacancies:

- 1 on a council of 7 seats
- 3 on a council of 9 seats
- 1 on a council of 11 seats
- 2 on a council of 11 seats
- 1 on a council of 13 seats

How often each year does the full parish council meet?

- Ranges from 3-4 times / year for a council of 5, every other month for the other council of 5 and most of the councils of 7, monthly for 10 of the councils and 18 times a year for one council of 9 (possibly includes committee meetings)

How often do committees / sub-committees meet per month? (Average)

- Ranges from 0 (no committees / sub-committees) to "rarely" to monthly to 24 per year

What is the average public attendance at Parish Council meetings?

- Ranges from 0 to 30

Code of Conduct

How many Councillors have received formal code of conduct training?

- Ranges from 0 to all

Has the Chairman received formal code of conduct training?

- 9 of 27

When was this training given?

- Earliest – 2006
- Most recent – 2009
- Orwell's Chairman is a member of the Standards Committee

Has the Clerk received formal code of conduct training?

- 18 of 27
- Milton added that their assistant clerk has also been trained
- Rampton's response was a question mark

When was this training given?

- Earliest – 2007
- Most recent – 2010

Are declarations of interest clearly identified as an item on the agenda?

- Yes – 24 councils
- No – 3 councils – Duxford, Haslingfield, Whittlesford

Are declarations of interest recorded precisely, and referenced to the appropriate item in the minutes?

- Yes – all respondents

Is the difference between personal or prejudicial interest fully understood by all members?

- Yes – 23 respondents
- No – 4 respondents: Cambourne, Hauxton, Orwell, Waterbeach

What aspects of the code of conduct, if any, have you found difficult to embrace in your village?

- Barton – “We have recently sought & obtained clarification re prejudicial interest”
- Bourn, Caxton, Comberton, Coton, Croxton, Eltisley, Guilden Morden, Hardwick, Madingley – “Same street declarations. When also on a charity especially of is ‘sole trustee’”
- Fen Ditton – “I have only been in post six months so I am not aware of any problems. Until recently there were four and then five vacancies on the council. However, existing members and new members have copies of the Code of Conduct, have declared their interests and completed the necessary forms.”
- Hauxton – “There’s a lot of information which I don’t think councillors have time to absorb. The councillors are volunteers and find it hard to make time to attend parish council meetings as it is.”
- Hinxton, Milton – “None.”
- Longstanton – “Councillors as Charitable Sole Trustees.”
- Orwell – “Regulations concerning personal & prejudicial interest”
- Rampton – “Personal interests are sometimes difficult in such a small village as we are so often quite close neighbours in planning applications. We tend to declare a personal interest to be on the safe side.”

Training and Support

What arrangements are made for induction and training of councillors?

- Barton – “Induction, no training ongoing.”
- Bourn, Caxton, Comberton, Coton, Croxton, Eltisley, Guilden Morden, Hardwick, Madingley – “All members are encouraged to attend training. The council has a training budget”
- Caldecote – “Training is funded when requested.”
- Cambourne – “Member of CPALC & circulate courses and bulletin & have a training”
- Fen Ditton – “Informal induction by clerk and other councillors. Formal training by CPALC is being organised for May 2010.”
- Haslingfield – “They attend training courses arranged by CPALC. We have 3 new councillors who are not yet trained. Attending a course in April.”
- Hauxton – “None.”
- Hinxton – “Many of our councillors have been in post for a number of years & have a wealth of experience.”
- Horningsea – “Ad hoc until now; but increasingly recognised as necessary early step.”
- Ickleton – “Councillors are invariably advised of available training courses.”
- Landbeach – “CPALC Training”
- Longstanton – “In House training initially.”
- Milton – “Training programmes arranged by the clerk through CPALC”
- Orwell – “Attend SCDC / CPALC training sessions”
- Rampton – “All councillors receive training”
- Swavesey – “The Clerk provides a ‘New Councillor’ information pack to newly appointed Councillors and talks through the general processes involved in the Parish Council. Full

information on training courses from CPALC is provided to all Councillors. The Council has a training budget with sufficient funds to enable new Councillors to attend CPALC's 'Councillor Professional Development' courses. Also to enable existing Councillors to attend refresher courses or specific subject training as appropriate."

- Waterbeach – "Councillors given a folder with information on code of conduct, , standing orders, planning process, role of Standards committee and standards board, register of interest, meeting procedures, audit regulations, statutory powers, budget setting and precept. Training arranged."
- Whittlesford – "CPALC Courses as required & literature pack from the Clk & Induction briefing"

Who provides your training?

- SCDC – 16 respondents
- CPALC – 23 respondents
- Society of Local Council Clerks – 16 respondents
- External provider – 2 (provider not specified)

Would you like training to be provided annually by SCDC?

- Yes – 14, Whittlesford noting 'if relevant'
- No – 2 (Caldecote, Milton)
- Haslingfield noted "Depends upon cost and frequency"

Public Access

Are all your meetings, Council *and* committees, held in a public venue?

- Yes – all respondents
- No – 1 respondent (Fen Ditton)

Have public meetings ever been held in a private house?

- Yes – 2 respondents (Barton, Fen Ditton)
- No – 24 respondents

If so, why?

- Barton – "in previous times, now realise they are not legal, unless have open access & notice"
- Cambourne – "not since May 2005"
- Fen Ditton – "Meeting of a sub-committee to discuss legal advice was held in a private house. Meeting of representatives of two sub-committees was held in clerk's house to formalise responses to the Mineral & Waste Management consultation. These meetings were advertised on the Council Notice Board for the required period. The first meeting was of a sensitive nature and members of the public were not invited. The second meeting was open to the public but none attended."

Do you publicise dates, times and venues of all public (Council *and* committee) meetings?

- Yes – all respondents

How long before a Council or committee meeting is the agenda published?

- 3 working days – 15 respondents
- 4 working days – 1 respondent
- 5 working days – 7 respondents
- 7 days / 1 week – 3 respondents
- 2 weeks – 1 respondent (Horningsea)

How do you make agendas and minutes of Council *and* committees available to the public?

- Notice Board – all respondents
- Website – 21 respondents (Fen Ditton notes: “Being built”, Horningsea “Plan PC area on website this year”)
- Other (please specify below) – 3 respondents:
 - Cambourne – “Library”
 - Fen Ditton – “As e-mail attachment to representatives of village organisations”
 - Longstanton – “copies available at meetings”
 - Whittlesford – “e-mail to all councillors & publicity member”

Do you have a parish website?

- Yes – 16 respondents (including Fen Ditton and Horningsea, which are planned or under construction)

Please give the address:

- 13 provided and added to SCDC website under Parish Council contact details

Has the Parish Council adopted rule 12.2 in the rules of procedure in allowing the public to speak at Parish meetings?

- Yes – 25 respondents
- No – 2 (Hauxton, Landbeach – however, both notified SCDC during 2007 to say that they had adopted 12.2 and we published a notice in the *Cambridge News* to this effect; see Standards Committee agenda 14 November 2007)

What is the frequency of public speaking opportunity at meetings?

- Monthly – 21 respondents (including Landbeach)
- Quarterly
- Six Monthly
- Yearly
- Other (please specify below)
 - Hauxton – “When needed. If members of the public attend about an issue – they are allowed to speak before the meeting formally begins.”
 - Hinxton – “2 monthly”
 - Rampton and Horningsea – “At all full meetings.”

Standing Orders

Does your council have Standing Orders?

- Yes – all respondents

Are they based on the NALC model?

- Yes – 26 respondents
- No – 1 respondent (Whittlesford)

What is the timetable for review?

- Barton, Hinxton, Landbeach, Orwell, Rampton, Swavesey, Waterbeach – “Annually” or “Yearly”
- Bourn, Caxton, Comberton, Coton, Croxton, Eltisley, Guilden Morden, Hardwick, Madingley – “Annual meeting every May”
- Caldecote – “New model to be adopted in 2010”
- Cambourne – “Annually or if advised of changes”
- Fen Ditton – “Yearly before the Annual Meeting”
- Haslingfield – “I am awaiting section 1 from CPALC before they can be adopted”
- Hauxton – “Next meeting”
- Horningsea – “No timetable”
- Ickleton – “These will be on the April Agenda for adoption. To be reviewed annually.”

- Longstanton – “At least annually”
- Milton – “Being reviewed now – 4 yearly cycle to coincide with Parish Council elections (next election 2011)”
- Whittlesford – “As required”

Do your Standing Orders set a term limit for the Chairman’s length of tenure?

- Yes – 2 respondents (Milton, Waterbeach)
- No – 14 respondents
- ? – 1 respondent (Whittlesford)

If yes, what is the limit?

- Milton, Waterbeach – 3 years
- Whittlesford – normally 3 years

Financial Regulations

Note – It is obligatory for all Parish Councils to adopt Financial Regulations

Are Financial Regulations reviewed on a regular basis?

- Yes – 23 respondents
- No – 4 respondents (Duxford, Fen Ditton, Haslingfield, Hauxton)

If so, at what frequency are they reviewed?

- Barton, Landbeach, Orwell, Swavesey, Waterbeach – “Annually”
- Bourn, Caxton, Comberton, Coton, Croxton, Eltisley, Guilden Morden, Hardwick, Madingley – “Annual meeting every May”
- Cambourne – “Annually or if advised of changes”
- Fen Ditton – “As I have been in post for only 6 months I do not know but they will be reviewed at the AGM”
- Haslingfield – “They are reviewed when any changes or updates are thought necessary”
- Hinxton – “Overall review at AGM. Regular review at all PC meetings.”
- Horningsea – “Recently re-started. Will be annual.”
- Ickleton – “Monthly”
- Longstanton – “At least annually”
- Milton – “Being reviewed now – 4 yearly cycle to coincide with Parish Council elections (next election 2011)”
- Rampton – “6 monthly”
- Whittlesford – “Constantly as changes arise”

Audit Arrangements

Note – External audit is mandatory and is preceded by an internal audit

What are the qualifications of your internal auditor?

- Barton – “Worked in insurance”
- Caldecote – “Not known”
- Duxford – “Chartered Accountant”
- Fen Ditton – “Previous internal auditor was an agency providing a service to Parish Councils. New Internal Auditor has no formal qualifications but is Internal Auditor to 14 other Parish Councils in South Cambs, East Cambs and Huntingdon districts. He has been on Waterbeach Parish Council for over 20 years and during that time have been chair of the finance committee as well as chair of the Council for a total of six years. He gives courses at CPALC on accounts issues for Clerks and Councillors and has a degree in law from the Open University and the ISCA Certificate in Charity Management taken at London South Bank University.”
- Haslingfield – “Chartered Accountant Memb. No. 7480635 BSc (Hons)”
- Hauxton – “Tax expert”
- Hinxton – “AQA Qualified Clerk at LGS Services with more than 10 years’ experience”
- Horningsea – “MIJAN, Waterbeach – Qualification not known”
- Ickleton – “MBA, C.Eng, F.I.Mech.E.”

- Landbeach – “FSB”
- Longstanton – “Not sure, would need to check.”
- Milton – “In a word NONE. The Audit Commission does not require Independent Internal Auditors to have any (let alone professional) qualifications. There should be an understanding of the methods and framework within which Parish Councils operate. canalbs ltd has taken out Indemnity Insurance so that you may be assured that in the event of you relying on information given within the remit of the audit regulations you have some recompense. I would expect SCDC to be aware of this.”
- Orwell – “Professional Banker”
- Swavesey – “He is a Parish Councillor and has been for over 20 years. He has been Chair of a Parish Council. He has been involved with CPALC for approx 15 years and has been its Honorary Treasurer for many of those years. He has been involved with the Audit Regime from its inception and presented training for Clerks and Councillors on audit procedures. He has also presented training on parish accounts and on Charity Law. He is an internal Auditor for a number of Parish Councils and also an Independent Examiner for a number of Charities.”
- Waterbeach – “Dip HE Local Policy”
- Whittlesford – “CPALC Trained”

How are your accounts monitored during the year?

- Barton – “Vetting by Chair / council & internal auditor”
- Bourn, Caxton, Comberton, Coton, Croxton, Eltisley, Guilden Morden, Hardwick, Madingley – “Overseen by the members at each meeting. Finance report checked, bank statements & invoices checked etc. in accord with policy”
- Caldecote – “Clerk & Council”
- Cambourne – “Monthly reports to Council”
- Fen Ditton – “Clerk presents summary of income and expenditure at each meeting; invoices are agreed in Council.”
- Haslingfield – “Normally inspected quarterly by Councillor nominated to keep an eye on financial matters”
- Hauxton – “Not monitored other than at meetings and by cheque co-signees”
- Hinxton – “By a village resident who is an accountant who looks at the accounts prior to each Council meeting.”
- Horningsea – “Every two months – RFO and Full Council”
- Ickleton – “Quarterly reviews are presented to Councillors”
- Landbeach – “3 monthly report”
- Longstanton – “Monthly income & expenditure with bank balances reports to Council. Full quarterly reports.”
- Milton – “Monthly reports to Council. Finance committee monitors in more detail quarterly.”
- Orwell – “By internal and external auditors”
- Rampton – “Quarterly at an ordinary PC meeting.”
- Swavesey – “Monthly bank reconciliations, quarterly budget analysis reports, circulated to all Councillors. Annual budget review and draft/setting for forthcoming year. Annual internal audit and external audit.”
- Waterbeach – “Spreadsheets/reports to finance committee”
- Whittlesford – “Monthly”

Does your internal audit provide an annual audit and ongoing advice and monitoring?

- Yes – 25 respondents
- No
- Other – Longstanton – “Yes to audit monitoring, no to advice”

Clerks

Do you have a Parish Clerk?

- Yes – 26 respondents (note that Caldecote was recruiting when they completed the questionnaire due to their Clerk moving away)
- No

Are they paid / unpaid?

- Paid – 26 respondents (note that Caldecote was recruiting when they completed the questionnaire due to their Clerk moving away)
- Unpaid

Has the clerk obtained a qualification under CiLCA (Certificate in Local Council Administration) training?

- Yes – 14 respondents
- No – 11 respondents
- Other – Milton – Not CiLCA but University of Glos Local Policy Certificate of Higher Education

Councillor Toolkit / Good Meetings Checklist

Is the councillor toolkit used by the Chairman / Clerk / or other Councillors?

- Yes – 23 respondents
- No – 3 respondents

In what ways has it been useful?

- Barton – “useful guidance”
- Fen Ditton – “Used by the Clerk and is available for reference at Council meetings. Clerk also uses for reference and guidance between meetings. Has been useful in ensuring the Agenda and meetings procedure is correct.”
- Haslingfield – “It is referred to when necessary”
- Hinxton – “It is a useful reference for practical issues”
- Horningsea – “Reference”
- Ickleton – “It is available for reference. When published, it was felt that Ickleton Parish Council was already compliant with the salient points.”
- Landbeach – “On the spot information.”
- Milton – “It is an extra aid (if necessary) to ensure that proper procedures are being followed although I prefer to use Arnold-Baker.”
- Orwell – “A good reference for many aspects of Parish Council work and also provides a good adjunct to P.C. Standing Orders.”
- Rampton – “To clarify points raised”
- Swavesey – “Clerk uses it as a reference tool”
- Waterbeach – “The toolkit has been made available to all councillors. I am unaware of whether or not they have found it useful”

What suggestions have you for any improvement?

- Bourn, Caxton, Comberton, Coton, Croxton, Eltisley, Guilden Morden, Hardwick, Maddingley – “Needs some understanding of reference to the size of the Council. Small councils find alot a burden.”
- Fen Ditton – “None – apart from shorten it if possible.”
- Hinxton – “Perhaps a short summary sheet could be useful”

Other

What additional support would you like to receive from the Standards Committee?

- Barton – “This questionnaire – I was unable to find it on scamb.gov.uk”
- Bourn, Caxton, Comberton, Coton, Croxton, Eltisley, Guilden Morden, Hardwick, Maddingley – “Training as previously requested”

- Fen Ditton – “I haven’t been in post long enough to answer this or the next two questions. I have found advice from SCD councillor Robert Turner very useful. We have a long term issue with a vexatious villager who has a Deed of Grant on council land. He is very critical of the Clerk and of the Council and sends personal letters and letters from his solicitors questioning actions which the Council has taken. I found the discussion at SLCC training and advice from Ian Dewar of CPALC very useful in advising the council and preparing for discussion with our lawyers.”
- Hauxton – “CPALC training never seems to be at a suitable time for me, and is always in the St Ives area. More local, shorter training courses would be useful eg for a cluster of 12 clerks and held at a central point.”
- Milton – “None”
- Swavesey – “We think annual code of conduct training would be helpful, to cover changes of Councillors and refresher workshops during each PC term”

What else would you like to tell us about what you do?

- Hauxton – “Would be useful to share expertise eg web design, who to order benches or sports surfacing from.”
- Hinxton – “Hinxton is a very small village with friendly, helpful residents. The PC has the best interests of the village as their priority and endeavour to serve the community as best they can.”
- Longstanton – “In essence it is to assist in improving and enhancing the community in which we serve in any way possible.”
- Swavesey – “We are a Quality Council and intend to renew this status. We have considered and will continue to consider whether to take on the Power of Wellbeing if we decide it will help us to provide improved services.”

What do you do well, and is there anything that you’d like to share with us as best practice for other Parish Councils to learn from?

- Barton – “Encourage local volunteers, e.g. Barton Beavers”
- Hauxton – “Monthly newsletters can be simple yet effective.”
- Hinxton – “There is a friendly but professional interaction between the Councillors. Meetings are a pleasure & there is no sense of anyone being self-seeking.”
- Longstanton – “Everything and nothing that they shouldn’t be doing already. Use common sense as best practice. Recognize all aspects of the community, particularly the elderly and youth.”
- Milton – “As a member of the SLCC I attend the local branch meetings. These meetings are helpful in promoting exchange of ideas and the sharing of good practice.”

Is the standards newsletter helpful?

- Yes – 21 respondents
- No – 1 respondent
- ? – 1 respondent

How could it be improved on?

- Barton – “Very good explanation given at recent SLCC branch meeting by Huntingdonshire rep.”
- Fen Ditton – “Some of the language could be simpler.”
- Hauxton – “Shorter”
- Hinxton – “It is rarely relevant to such a small council.”
- Longstanton – “The reading material for Councillors is substantial. Reduction rather than additional paperwork would be an improvement.”
- Milton – “It is another one of the numerous documents received that has the occasional piece of useful information.”

Additional Notes

Parish Councils with a Parish Council Member on the Standards Committee – 3 of 4 did not respond:

- Gamlingay – did not respond
- Orwell – responded
- Stapleford – did not respond
- Teversham – did not respond

Parish Councils with a District Council Member on the Standards Committee – 14 of 18 did not respond:

- Babraham – did not respond
- Bar Hill – did not respond
- Bassingbourn – did not respond
- Dry Drayton – did not respond
- (Fulbourn – did not respond) – district councillor defeated at election but was on Standards Committee when questionnaire sent out in March
- Great Abington – did not respond
- Guilden Morden – responded
- Harston – did not respond
- Hauxton – responded
- Hinxton – responded
- Litlington – did not respond
- Little Abington – did not respond
- Longstanton – responded
- (Meldreth – did not respond) – district councillor stood down at election but was on Standards Committee when questionnaire sent out in March
- Pampisford – did not respond
- (Shepreth – did not respond) – district councillor stood down at election but was on Standards Committee when questionnaire sent out in March
- Steeple Morden – did not respond
- Whaddon – did not respond

Parish Councils from which have a member has been the subject of a complaint since May 2008, the clerks to which would have received a copy of the decision notice – 6 of 11 did not respond.