



Case Study

Establishing a New Local Council

2023

SLCC
For Local Council Professionals®



SLCC

For Local Council Professionals

Society of Local Council Clerks (SLCC)

Founded in 1972, SLCC has gone from strength to strength, starting with just 50 members and now representing clerks to over 5,000 councils in England and Wales.

As the professional body for local council clerks and senior council employees, we ensure that our members are equipped with the necessary knowledge, training and skills to thrive within their role and best support their council and community.

SLCC is a vibrant and focused organisation which helps local council officers to develop and grow professionally and so be able to better serve their councils and the communities they support.



Local Council Consultancy (LCC)

To further the service provided, LCC was launched in late 2018 by SLCC as an additional capability to its advisory and membership services. It draws on the wide and deep expertise of SLCC and seeks to provide councils with a value for money, sector-leading consultancy service.

LCC operates on a **'profit-for purpose' basis, reinvesting all surpluses to further the development of professional clerks and, through them, the development of the whole sector.**

LCC services are delivered by our team of associates and Certificate in Local Council Administration (CiLCA) qualified clerks who are grounded in core public service values, a number of whom have worked in principal authorities and are now in the town and parish council sector.

With unification of councils fast approaching, LCC have developed an offering to provide support, expertise, and solutions to authorities facing the challenges of replacing the existing council structures with alternative arrangements. Our specialism is to facilitate the establishment of the new city, town, and parish councils that require creation, as a result of the unitary process. Past experience has enabled us to develop a roadmap to safely navigate you through the journey, utilising the skills of the people who have first-hand experience within this field.

With strong connections and access to specialist legal firms, insurance brokers, IT providers, and other sector specific support companies, we are well placed to meet the challenges ahead and deliver the new councils.



Our Offering

LCC can provide solutions for all stages of establishing a new council from community governance reviews to recruiting the new team. It's a complex area with many different aspects to consider, particularly as the parish council sector is administered differently to the principal authority sector. We can offer expertise and support in all workstreams and can provide experience and solutions such as:

Community Governance

- > What are your aspirations for the unparished areas - single town council, other new parishes or adjustments of existing boundaries?
- > What is the preferred option for the new council(s)?
- > Consultation with local population - do they want a town council and how would they like it to look?
- > What should warding arrangements be for the new council(s)?

Reorganisation Orders

- > Have specialist lawyers been engaged to draft order(s)?
- > How will the transfer of the mayoralty and civic functions be managed?
- > How will civic property and the right to appoint offices of civic dignity be transferred?
- > What services and functions will be transferred?
- > What impact is there on any Charter Trustees?
- > Who will manage the petition for the transfer of Coat of Arms?
- > Is a Letters Patent application for transfer of city status needed?

Elections

- > What election publicity materials are required?
- > What is the process for encouraging candidates to stand for new council(s) - publicity, public meetings, advice, and guidance?

Website and Branding

- > What is the new council brand/logo?
- > What domain name will be used and what information will be on the website?
- > Who will be the website, IT, and telephony suppliers?

Staffing

- > Does an interim clerk need to be assigned?
- > Who will carry out the benchmarking exercise to determine role and salary of new town clerk (and officers)?
- > What is the selection process for new?
- > What support positions need to be created and what should the staffing structure look like?
- > Will TUPE apply?
- > How will the recruitment process be managed?

Our Offering (Continued)

Facilities

- > Where will the council be located and in what premises?
- > What infrastructure is required?
- > What assets will be transferred and on what basis?

Governance Policies and Procedures

- > What will the Standing Orders, Financial Regulations include?
- > How will data protection, the Freedom of Information act, and Transparency Code compliance be managed?
- > What councillor allowances will there be?
- > What will the committee structure look like?

Finance

- > What sector specific audit arrangements need to be made?
- > What will the initial funding be?
- > What banking and accountancy package will be utilised?
- > At what level will the initial precept be set and what is the budget?
- > How will the payroll arrangements be managed?

Our Team

LCC has a wealth of knowledge and expertise amongst its strong, diverse team with specialisms in all areas. Some of the team are:



Richard Walden - DMA, CiLCA, FLSCC, HNC Business Studies

Richard has worked with and for town and parish councils for over 50 years and is one of the best-known practitioners in the sector. He served as Head of Administrative Services for Luton Borough Council responsible for committees and democratic and civic services, elections, land charges and licensing.

In 1985 he was appointed the first town clerk to the newly created Dunstable Town Council. Over the next 22 years under Richard's management the Council grew to one of the largest in the country with a precept of over £2M and a turnover of nearly £3M. On taking early retirement in 2007 Richard formed his own consultancy specialising in support for local councils. He has served two terms (April - June 2007 and December 2015 - February 2017) as Interim Chief Executive of SLCC, the professional body for the sector. He edited the sector's bi-monthly professional magazine, The Clerk, from 2011 to 2020.

Continued overleaf >

Richard has undertaken many projects and service reviews for larger local councils and managed the recruitment of many town clerk posts including for Houghton Regis, Waltham Abbey, Loughton, Dunstable, Dorchester; Lichfield, Newark, Radstock, and Ludlow. He served as Acting town clerk to Ludlow TC in 2008/2009 after the council had experienced some particular difficulties. In 2010 he was the parish council representative on the (then) DCLG Working Group which produced the statutory Guidance for Community Governance Reviews.

Most recently he served from February 2020 to May 2021 as acting town clerk to the new Northampton Town Council, overseeing its establishment as the largest in the country with a population of over 130,000.

Richard has delivered and facilitated numerous training courses for local council clerks and councillors throughout the country for over 20 years and from 1994 to 2006 was visiting lecturer to the School of Local Policy at Gloucestershire University.

Reg Williams

Reg commenced his career in local government at the London Borough of Hillingdon where he was sponsored to go through horticultural college in the early 1980's. Having worked his way up the ranks to various managerial positions, he moved to Salisbury District Council in Wiltshire as Parks Manager in 1988.

There followed a fast expansion of the work areas he was responsible for leading to being Head of Parks and Street Services by the late 1990's.

In 2007, the government announced that Wiltshire would move to a two tier unitary and parish layout from the three tier arrangements in place at that time. As Salisbury was unparished, and the government order included that a parish be created for the city, Reg was appointed as a Lead Officer in setting up what would become Salisbury City Council.

This new authority went live in April 2009 and Reg was appointed as the very first city clerk of the new body. Reg was responsible for a very wide range of services which included various car parks and a crematorium. The new city council immediately became possibly the largest council within the sector at that time, with a turnover of about £5m per annum in 2010. Within a few years that turnover had grown to nearer £6.5m per annum after a large and successful delegation project was negotiated with the new unitary council, Wiltshire Council.

Reg retired from his role in 2018 after 40 years local government service. Since then, he has worked as a LCC consultant delivering solutions to the town and parish sector. He is extremely knowledgeable in all tiers of local government and has been actively involved in the preparation and setting up of a large council within the sector.





Peter Young

Peter has over 40 years' local government experience. He has been clerk to several large town councils, and more recently various smaller parish councils, which has given him a broad and practical understanding of the special requirements of the town and parish council sector. He was clerk to Lichfield City Council for over 28 years and so has a particular knowledge of civic and protocol matters.

He has served on the SLCC's Board of Directors and was President of SLCC in 2015/16 when he led a far-reaching review which resulted in a successful restructuring of SLCC's governance arrangements and its service provision to members.



Janine Gardner - M.A. Cert IPSAS CiLCA

Janine Gardner is the town clerk and responsible financial officer to Cranbrook Town Council, a local council which was created in 2015 in response to a new town being built from scratch, on land which used to be green fields. Janine was the council's first employee after its creation and has stayed in post ever since. Construction works had started in 2011 and in 2021, approximately 6,000 residents occupied 2,300 or so properties. East Devon District Council's Local Plan makes provision for the delivery of circa 8,000 homes in Cranbrook, which will house in the region of 25,000 residents eventually. Alongside the development sits an extensive Section 106 agreement and under her leadership, the town council has not only developed into a well-functioning local authority with a clean audit record but also completed a number of asset and service transfers to it, including a multi-purpose building, a 30-hectare country park and nature reserve, sports pitches, allotments, play areas, a litter picking and bin emptying service, community development work, public education and a youth service. Janine is currently working on the delivery of additional assets in-house, including a sports pavilion, a wheeled sports facility, and a town hall - the latter as part of the future delivery of the entire town centre which, at the moment, is little more than scrubland.

In a previous role, Janine worked for the then Wiltshire County Council when it was reorganising into a unitary authority and was responsible for supporting the transitional governance arrangements - a transition cabinet, the corresponding scrutiny board, and a working group made up of the leaders of the then county and district councils developing the budget proposals for the new Wiltshire Council. Janine was also involved in the development of the area boards in Wiltshire which facilitate local decision-making in the absence of district councils.



Helen Ball - FSLCC

Helen Ball has been a clerk in the parish and town council sector for nearly 25 years starting as a parish clerk in a rural village in East Yorkshire, helping to set up Beverley Town Council in the late 1990s before her current appointment as the first town clerk of Shrewsbury Town Council in 2009. Now managing one of the largest town councils in the country with a £4m budget, 100 members of staff and a multi-million pound asset portfolio, she has provided advice and practical support to other principal authorities looking at new council creation. Helen is a Local Policy Graduate of Gloucestershire University and holds the Certificate in Local Councils Administration (CILCA).



Lynda Rollason

As a senior HR and Organisational Development (OD) specialist, Lynda is well versed in working with people at all levels. Her extensive experience includes designing and implementing transformational change, organisational structures, planning effective employee engagement approaches, designing and implementing reward and recognition packages, as well as designing HR strategies and HR operational plans that deliver on corporate objectives and add organisational value.

Lynda recently led an extensive organisational re-structuring for one of the University of Oxford's medical sciences departments which demonstrated her expertise in working constructively with staff at all levels as evidenced by the individual consultations she did with affected staff, as well as collective consultation with the unions. Lynda's relationship with Oxford continues as the work was ground-breaking for the university.

It is fair to say that Lynda has the gravitas from her interpersonal skills, coupled with her in-depth experience that provides assurance to all parties of her impartiality. She undertakes through analysis, ensuring the conclusions reached are fair and measured. This is evidenced by the strong reputation Lynda has that ensures the longevity of her relationship with her clients and from their recommendations the new clients that regularly approach her.

Lynda is the HR advisor to the SLCC management team and is also an associate on the SLCC's advisory service 'bench'. She has worked with Melksham, Monmouth, Royal Leamington Spa, Ross-on-Wye and Shrewsbury Town Councils. This work has included organisational re-structuring and town clerk recruitment.



Jane Biscombe - FSLCC

Jane joined local government as a youth worker in 1991 and via a few years in community development, alighted as a local committee and partnerships officer at Surrey County Council in 2001. Ten years later Jane moved to Hampshire County Council to manage their Action Team, just a few months before councillors decided they didn't want an Action Team! Jane was then offered the enlightening role of crisis project manager and was parachuted into council services to deal with problems as diverse as legal process re-engineering, religious education communications, complaints, highways planning and housing allocations. Jane returned to Surrey County Council as a Commissioning Manager in the Social Care Transformation Team before finding her way to Woking Borough Council as change and transformation manager.

The call to be a clerk became too strong to resist in 2015 and Jane moved to Yateley Town Council and was awarded the New Clerk of the Year award by the SLCC in 2017. A chance email about the new town council being set up in Weymouth in 2018 led Jane to where she is now; living by the sea with her four cats, snorkelling regularly, getting interviewed by the BBC on badger trauma, and regularly consulted on how to set up a new council.

Jane is a fellow of SLCC, holds a BSc in Environmental Protection, as well as PGDips in social policy, criminology, and environmental engineering. Jane is a regular presenter at National Conferences and has been published in NALC's magazine, LCR, on the subject of setting up new parish and town councils.



Tracy Predeth - BA (Hons), MPA, FSLCC

Tracy is an experienced and professional clerk who graduated with a Degree in Local Policy and a Masters Degree in Public Administration. With over 23 years' of experience in local government, Tracy has led many parish and town councils around the country both large and small through transitional and organisational change, helped with recruitment and troubleshooting as well as assisting councils through staff absences and the threat of judicial review. Tracy has also mentored new clerks helping them to achieve their CILCA qualification and assisted inexperienced councillors to help shape the council for good governance.

Tracy has experience in working with principal authorities in Wiltshire and Hampshire, assisting with community governance reviews, boundary reviews, reorganisation orders, asset transfers, budget. Precept setting and special expenses. Her work has also involved election arrangements, consulting with the electorate and promoting and encouraging potential candidates for election.

Working in partnership with chief executives, monitoring officers, key officers and solicitors, Tracy has first-hand experience in the creation of new parish and town councils, working alongside shadow councillors to set policy and procedures, banking arrangements, and assisting with the transfer of statutory allotments, cemetery, community buildings, play and sport areas and creation of websites and IT equipment to ensure that everything is in place for a smooth transition at vesting day.



Andrew Towleron

Andrew Towleron has more than 30 years' experience in the public and private sectors, including at senior levels. A qualified planner, he is the SLCC National Planning Advisor as well as running his own planning consultancy which specialises in helping parish councils prepare neighbourhood plans. In addition, he is a qualified parish clerk to a medium sized parish council.

Previously, Andrew was assistant director at a district council where he managed the planning, housing, consultation and community involvement services. He is passionate about, and has a wealth of experience in, supporting communities to achieve their aims and aspirations. This includes ensuring and delivering community engagement and consultation.

Andrew has a master's degree in public administration with a particular focus on the opportunities and barriers the Localism Bill presents to parish councils.



Alan Mellor

Alan has over 47 years' local government experience and is a fully qualified CIPFA Accountant. Having been a Chief Executive at a district council, as well as a district council Section 151 officer and returning officer; Alan now holds the post as town clerk for Newark Town Council.

He had a pivotal role in negotiating and delivering a devolution agreement for Newark Town Council resulting in the transfer of parks and open spaces, public conveniences, and a market from the district council. This was accompanied by a legacy funding package to ensure the affordability of the transfer which amounted to around £750,000 annual gross expenditure.

His experience of working in, and managing a challenging political environment, and extensive knowledge and experience of partnership working, adds to his extensive knowledge and experience.

Alan is an SLCC board member, representing the Midlands area and a Justice of the Peace for the Nottingham Magistrates Bench.



Kate Houlihan - PSLCC

Kate began her working life in a sales and marketing environment and then following a career break began a career in the local council sector.

She now has over 17 years' experience working with local councils. Kate has worked with a number of town and parish councils in Northamptonshire and Leicestershire including six years as town clerk to Raunds Town Council in East Northamptonshire. During her time at Raunds the town council became the only council in Northamptonshire to gain the Gold Standard in the Local Council Award Scheme.

Most recently Kate has been working as the Interim Clerk for two newly formed Parish Councils in Northamptonshire, Kingsthorpe Parish Council (17,060 electors) and Far Cotton and Delapre Community Council (7,700 electors.) Both councils were formed following local government re-organisation in Northamptonshire. This saw the creation of two new Unitary Authorities covering Northamptonshire and for the first time all areas in the county becoming parished.

Kate supported both new councils through the new initial budget setting process through to the elections and the launch of the councils. As well as ensuring both councils had suitable governance arrangements in place Kate was also able to quickly ensure that both councils quickly developed their own identities and started delivering a wide range of projects for the local community.

Kate is a Principal member of SLCC, is CiLCA qualified, and she has trained and mentored other clerks, and has delivered training to clerks and councillors across the sector.

Case Study One

One Council for Shropshire - Shrewsbury Town Council's Experience of Unitary Creation

The creation of unitary councils in traditional district and county council areas bring great opportunities to the parish and town council sector. It allows for existing parish and town councils to consider whether there are services, functions, land and buildings, they may feel are best placed at the most local tier of local government, but also inevitably it will mean that parish and town councillors may have to fill that knowledge and support gap that develops as two tiers merge functions.

Crucially, unitary creation also allows for the creation of new town councils particularly where borough councils have fulfilled that role of the lowest tier of local government and one where the chairman of that local authority is the mayor of that town.

Creation of new town councils needs to be considered in tandem with the creation of the unitary council, so that once vesting day arrives the two new authorities to operate seamlessly so that the public they serve, continue to receive the same standard and quality of service.

Shrewsbury Town Council went through this process in 2009 and was created to work in tandem with the new Shropshire Unitary Council. On vesting day, a whole raft of assets were transferred from the outgoing Shrewsbury and Atcham Borough Council; these assets included land and buildings, services and functions, staff, machinery and plant, civic regalia and charters; assets that truly defined Shrewsbury as a place.

Getting things right should not be underestimated and setting a vision for the new town council in terms of where it will sit in the local government hierarchy, how it will serve its electorate and rate payers, and how it will work in harmony with higher tiers in local government with a suitable running time, is crucial to its success.

Continued overleaf >

Learning from Shrewsbury's Experience;

- 1.** Develop a working group - this will help establish the right actions at the right time, engaging the right officers. This group will also help long-term in developing on-going relations with the new unitary council
- 2.** Decide early what services the new council will manage - this will determine any land transfers and appropriate staff to TUBE transfer. Think of all assets including statues and war memorials
- 3.** Land transfers can be very bureaucratic. Whilst the Land Registry has the capability to transfer all land from the outgoing local authorities to the new unitary, this is not the case for the new town council. Each title will have to be transferred separately
- 4.** Identify the key staff to transfer - they will help champion the development of the new council and instill confidence in other staff to transfer to the new council
- 5.** Establish a good communications plan to communicate externally to the public, but internally to local government departments, as well as staff who will be employed
- 6.** Think about the necessary support services for the new town council including legal, HR, payroll, IT, finance and audit
- 7.** Maintain the continuity of any charters including mayoral charters, civic regalia and mayoral silver, freedom rights and market rights. Whilst many of these might be maintained in museum and archive facilities, ownership needs to be considered

Helen Ball - FSLCC

Town Clerk to Salisbury Town Council, 2009-Current

Case Study Two

Cranbrook Town Council - Developing a Newly Created Local Council

This project involved developing a new local council after its creation which commenced after all the legal parameters such as adopting standing orders, financial regulations, code of conduct, establishing a governance structure, and payroll procedures had been set.

Due to the unique nature of the council it was imperative to remain adaptable and have the skills and abilities to overcome the challenges and take advantage of the opportunities. Some of the challenges faced by Cranbrook were not replicated elsewhere and advice not readily available, for example, when the council took the decision to assume responsibility for the management and maintenance of all public open spaces which had previously been covered by a town-wide estate rent charge.

The council continues to evolve which requires a deep understanding of the sector as the size, scope, and responsibilities change.

Janine Gardner

Town Clerk to Cranbrook Town Council, December 2015-Current

Case Study Three

Salisbury City Council - Creation of a new City Council

In 2007, Wiltshire County Council put forward a proposal to the government to move Wiltshire from a traditional three-tier structure (county council, four district councils, and various parish/town councils) to a two-tier structure - Wiltshire Unitary Council plus the parish/town council sector. Three of the district councils were tentatively in agreement with the approach by the county council, but one was opposed.

Later that year, the government issued the approval for Wiltshire to move to the proposed two-tier structure, with a vesting day of 1 April 2009 set. At the time there was no parish level council for the city of Salisbury, the ceremonial arrangements were met via Charter Trustees representing the city, made up of the Salisbury district councillors elected to the eight city wards. They raised a tiny precept annually which was administered by the district council. With this in mind, the government made an order that as part of the unitary arrangements that a parish council be set up to cover the city to be known as Salisbury City Council, and that this new body also take over the charter trustee functions. A number of surveys were undertaken of the city residents, with the outcome being that the new city council would be welcomed providing it was set up sufficiently strong financially and was able to take on a good number of local services - thereby being a "proper" council.

The Implementation Executive set up by the outgoing Wiltshire County Council to oversee the whole move to unitary status were in full agreement, that if there was to be a new city council for Salisbury, that it needed to be given a solid foundation from which to build.

Discussions with them were therefore far more constructive and productive than it may have been feared at the time even though there was a real difference in the political make-up of the differing bodies. Politics were, thankfully, put to one side as the negotiations commenced. From the outset it was agreed that services and facilities etc that would transfer to the new city council would be a mix of those which cost to run (public conveniences for instance) and those which could generate revenue to help off-set costs (certain car parks for instance), leading to an initial precept that was reasonable.

Continued overleaf >

This led to a new city council that, when it went live in April 2009, immediately became one of, if not the largest by breadth of services provided, councils within the sector overnight, with a turnover then of almost £5m, and services as broad as car parks, parks and open spaces, cemeteries and a crematorium, community centres, investment properties, markets, fairs etc.

For a period after vesting day, the new council was managed day-to-day by a series of staff who TUPE'd to it as part of the process, headed by the most senior officer who transferred.

In May 2009, the first elections were held to the new body and a new administration set up, headed by a leader of the council. The ceremonial arrangements carried on as before with the first mayor of the new body being the 745* Mayor of the city. In November 2009, interviews were held to appoint the first city clerk to manage the staff side of the new body and I was fortunate enough to be appointed to that post - a post I was both proud and honoured to hold for nine years thereafter.

Key Lessons:

- > Work must start at the absolute earliest opportunity after the government has announced its decision to move to a two-tier structure.
- > The Implementation Executive must recognise that any new council within the parish sector set up as part of the process must be given sufficient services and facilities to make it a worthwhile body in its own right and that it must be financially stable and viable.
- > Politics must be put to one side if the best outcomes are to be reached for the residents, especially if there are differing political groups involved.
- > The services and functions to transfer should be embedded into the creation order prior to vesting day, and not left to the discretion of the new unitary council.
- > If a city council is being created, then letters patent must be applied for to enable the new body to carry on using the 'city' name!

Reg Williams
City Clerk to Salisbury City Council, 2009-2018

Case Study Four

Wiltshire County Council Reorganises into Wiltshire Council

Janine joined the then Wiltshire County Council part-way through its reorganisation into a unitary authority and was responsible, for supporting the transitional decision-making body, the Implementation Executive. Leaders and deputy leaders from Wiltshire County Council and the district councils were represented on this transitional cabinet which took all the decisions to enable the establishment of the new Wiltshire Council.

Amalgamating several complex budgets into one was challenging enough, but getting the future governance arrangements right is also essential for the future democratic decision-making processes and for ensuring that residents do not feel disenfranchised from those processes.

Another important consideration in any reorganisation is the (future) role of town and parish councils and the way in which they might deliver future services - especially as higher-tier authorities can be reluctant to take responsibility for anything other than required by statute in light of budget pressures.

Janine Gardner

Democratic Services Officer, April 2008-March 2009

Case Study Five

Northampton Town Council - Formation of Two Parish Councils in Northamptonshire Background to Local Government Reform in Northamptonshire

In 2018, an independent inspection of Northamptonshire County Council, 'The Caller Report', called for proposals to restructure local government in Northamptonshire. Following much local debate, proposals were approved that would see the abolition of the existing county council and the seven borough and district councils and the creation of two new unitary authorities. One serving the north of the county North Northamptonshire Council and the other serving the west. West Northamptonshire Council.

It was recognised that these proposals would lead some areas of the county to have only a single tier of local government to represent them and that this could lead to a lack of democratic representation. Alongside this the Northamptonshire County Association of Local Councils (NcALC) had long been doing substantive work across the county to bring forward proposals for the whole of the Northamptonshire to become "parished". The move to the unitary authorities created the perfect opportunity to bring this to fruition. The four borough councils, Wellingborough, Northampton, Corby and Kettering all undertook community governance reviews which led to the creation of new town and parish councils which covered the whole of the county.

Community Governance Review Northampton

In Northampton a cross-party working group supported by NcALC reviewed the evidence from the Community Governance review and proposals were tabled and approved by the Borough Council. These proposals led to the creation of Northampton Town Council (90,000 electors), Kingsthorpe Parish Council (17060 electors) and Far Cotton and Delapre Community Council (7700 electors.) The political buy-in across all parties was important to the success of the proposals, and the importance of political buy-in shouldn't be under-estimated.

Continued overleaf >

The new councils were officially formed from the 1 April 2020 with elections due in May 2020. The first challenge to the entire process was of course the pandemic. The May 2020 elections were postponed and the focus of the borough council turned to dealing with the consequences of the pandemic and the move to the unitary authorities. Without elections the Borough Council had to appoint members to “shadow” authorities to ensure that the new councils met their legal requirements during 2020/21. An agreement was also reached to provide external support and interim clerking services to the new councils.

Shadow Councils and Local Representation

The first meetings of Kingsthorpe Parish Council and Far Cotton and Delapre Community Council took place in January 2020 with shadow councillors appointed from amongst the existing ward members and neighbouring wards. It’s worth remembering that these meetings took place online with the public able to view the stream on-line. A small number of residents were given access to join these meetings as non-voting observers. This gave some community representation within the process. The non-voting members may have benefitted from their role being more clearly defined.

Budgets: Understanding the Profile of the Community

The first task for the shadow councils was to agree a budgets and set a precept for 2021-2022. The cross-party working group had prepared recommended budgets for each of the new councils. The budget and precept recommendations passed with little challenge at Kingsthorpe. However; at Far Cotton and Delapre Community Council the shadow councils had more concerns about the level of taxation being levied on residents, particularly in a ward that falls within the top 10% most deprived wards in the country. It was important to recognise this concern and the profile of residents within the ward, the traditional “Band D” bench mark for describing council tax was inappropriate in a ward where 21% of properties fall in Band A. Revised reports were submitted to the shadow council which more clearly set out the proportion of councils in each band.





Community Engagement and Information

Clearly an important task for the shadow councils was to promote candidacy for the elections. The ability for the councils to engage with residents was severely hampered by the pandemic as no public meetings or even leafleting was able to take place. Much of the engagement was done online through social media and council websites. At the Town Council political parties drove up candidacy for the elections, however the two new Parishes were less successful in gaining candidates.

Whilst the pandemic clearly had a huge impact on local engagement. It cannot be stressed enough that early engagement is key to a successful drive for candidates.

A visible cross-party campaign and information available in a range of formats to explain the creation of the new parishes and how people could stand for election would be of benefit.

Early Wins and Raising the Profile of the Councils

Whilst this case study has highlighted some of the key considerations when forming new councils the real measure of success is what those councils are able to achieve for their communities. Given that the councils only began to operate in May they have both achieved a great deal for their communities.

In Kingsthorpe the local library was threatened with permanent closure. The parish council quickly took this on-board as their flag-ship project and have been working to ensure the library can be re-opened as soon as possible. A local school had already expressed an interest in running the library as a community run library and the parish council have been able to offer the school a range of support which ensures the sustainability of the schools' proposals. The parish council has supported with funding, led a drive to recruit volunteers and led negotiations around the lease of the building with the unitary authority.

Continued overleaf >

In Far Cotton and Delapre, the council have focused on raising the profile of the council and engaging with residents. A newsletter has been delivered to every-household; a community engagement event was held. The council successfully applied for external funding for an 'in bloom' project. The council has also supported the police with crime prevention measures including the provision of bike marking kits, again the council was successful in gaining grant funding for this. In addition, the council has launched a small grants scheme to support community groups, especially those struggling in their post-covid recovery.

In just six months both councils have been able to offer tangible benefits for their communities thus proving the importance of really local democracy.

Kate Houlihan - PSLCC

**Interim Clerk Kingsthorpe Parish Council and Far Cotton and Delapre
Community Council, February 2021-Current**

Case Study Six

Northampton Town Council - Creation of a New Town Council

For well-reported reasons concerning the financial circumstances of Northants County Council, the Secretary of State announced In 2018 that the county and seven borough/district councils In Northants would be replaced by two new unitary councils. Shadow elections would be held In 2020 and the new councils would assume responsibilities on 1 April 2021.

One of the councils to be replaced, Northampton Borough, decided to conduct a community governance review (CGR) of Its area to test public reaction to forming a new town council in that part of the borough which was currently unparished. There were ten parishes within the borough which collectively accounted for approximately 35% of its population.

The public response showed a great majority in favour of a new town council which would primarily be responsible for ensuring the continuation of the town's ancient mayoralty (the third oldest in the country), civic traditions and events. There were also strong representations for the creation of two new parish councils in the north and south of the town. One option in the consultation offering a town council only covering the town centre area and leaving a large section of the eastern part of the borough unparished, did not find favour.

There was political agreement on all these suggestions, but the precise boundaries of one of the two new parishes proved to be very contentious and delayed a final decision arising from the CGR until January 2020. The new town council would serve a population of approx. 115,000 (approx, half of the borough's population.) At the borough council meeting in February 2020, it was agreed that the mayoralty, the historic Guildhall, and a range of other assets and services, be transferred to the new town council. In the event there proved to be insufficient time to include all the transfers in the creation order (which was made on 31 March 2020). The onset of covid-19, however, meant that the intended elections for both the new unitary councils and the three new parishes were delayed until May 2021.

Continued overleaf >

Existing councillors for the relevant areas were appointed as unitary and town/parish councillors. The CEO of the borough was to convene the first meetings of the new parishes but more pressing priorities of dealing with covid-19 and establishing the new unitaries meant that all work on the new town council was put on hold. It was not until December 2020 that the first meeting of the town council was called. The newly appointed town councillors had been serving for six years and were quite possibly now serving on two principal councils and two shadow councils. Some appointed councillors were no longer interested/able to contribute leaving a small number of members available to the town council. Finding times when these could all make a town council meeting to take some urgent essential decisions among a very crowded diary proved extremely challenging.

Despite these challenges the borough council was still keen to transfer assets and services to the town council and, in almost its very last act, entered into agreement for transfer on 31 March 2021. The new unitary council has not yet recognised this agreement (as it was not party to it) and assets are still not transferred (in November 2021). This remains a major point of difference between the two councils which has been exacerbated by the May 2021 elections returning a labour council and a conservative unitary council, both with large majorities.

In the absence of knowing precisely which services and assets it would be responsible for the town council was forced to approve a contingency budget and precept for 2021/22.

Conclusions:

1. The principal council facing extinction with a large unparished area needs to be clear at a very early stage about its intentions for a town (or parish) council to succeed it and preserve local democratic control of local services and maintain civic traditions
2. A timely decision on a new town council would enhance the chances of new appointed councillors being able to devote adequate time to town council business.
3. Once a decision to form a town council has been taken after a CGR, a clear decision needs to be taken at the same time as to which assets and services are to be transferred to it. These can then be included in the creation order (for example, as was the case with Shrewsbury, Salisbury and Weymouth)
4. Ideally, if time allows, the new parish (town) council should be elected at least one year before it assumes responsibility for services to enable a structured transfer of services and staff to take place

Richard Walden - FSLCC
Acting Town Clerk, February 2020-May 2021

Case Study Seven

Weymouth Town Council - Setting up a New Council Knitting Fog, and Other Lessons in Local Government

Who wouldn't want to set up their own council? The chance to get it right, to shape local democracy to benefit communities and manage modern, focused processes unencumbered by tradition, nostalgia and 'we've always done it this way' roadblocks. It was those thoughts that led me to Weymouth - the jewel of the Jurassic Coast - midway through the local government reorganisation in Dorset in 2018 to help set up Weymouth Town Council (WTC) one of the largest town councils in England (£4.2m budget, 29 councillors, 60 staff.)

Setting up a new council is a bit niche, so I hope some of the things I learnt will be of use to you, regardless of where you are in your council's journey.

Some days were easier than others. Transfer of undertakings (Protection of Employment) regulations staff meetings were exciting, speaking with community leaders was insightful and researching best practise was engrossing (I'm a policy geek.) But some days brought challenges which no guidance or legislation had prepared me for How do you open a bank account for a council that doesn't exist? How do you run a council without any councillors? How do you launch a website when you don't know if you'll be a parish or a town council? And what do you do when a global pandemic scuppers your meticulously planned four-year development strategy?

Lesson one - be brave, be creative, and be prepared for problem-solving on an industrial and uncharted scale.

There's no book on setting up a new council, no webinar, no Certificate in Local Council Administration (CiLCA) unit and only a few of us have had the honour of doing it. So, while being creative, ensure that you're working in your reality. Think outside the box, but don't go interstellar without a good flight crew.

Continued overleaf >

Lesson two - reality checks

Surround yourself with critical friends and get a shadow council in place if you can.

Give people the chance to shape their future. Involve officers, councillors, and residents. Find out their hopes and fears for the future. When you've been in local government for a while, you have your ideas on how to make the perfect council, but a council is for everyone, not just the clerk.

Lesson three - facilitate, don't control

Let systems grow to meet their environment under your careful tending.

Build a network of contacts while talking to people. This will help in the future when all the issues you hadn't thought of appear. When the council pops into existence, remember you're not sailing off on your own, you're joining a flotilla.

Lesson four - build firm foundations with networks.

Be open and tell people what you are doing. Create excitement for the future and support Inclusion. Co-design with communities where you can. Get your social media sorted early - just in case someone online decides to nab your social media handles.

Lesson five - Communicate

Communicate with everyone who will listen, then do it again and again.

The moment a new council comes into existence is just the beginning. It's tempting to see it as the end of a long, hard journey, but it's just the start. You won't get everything right first time (or second. I'm still defining budgets and drafting policies in year two.

Lesson six - You won't get it right for day one, and that is OK. Stay agile and keep learning.

I still get praise for having got the council up and running quickly and smoothly. But, truth be told, it was tough to fail. WTC was set up in a can-do culture with a genuine drive for improvement and change. Dorset Councils Partnership (as was, it's now WTC and Dorset Council] was behind the project 100% with dedicated and enthusiastic staff and resources to support us to make this a rebirth and not a messy divorce.

Lesson seven - Start with a culture that breeds success. If you can't start there, then plan how you are going to get there.

This is an excellent opportunity to let every bit of experience and skill you have come together to facilitate something amazing. Revel in the sheer chaos of writing your rule book and solving problems you never knew existed, but look after yourself as you do.

Continued overleaf >

Lesson eight - Look after your well-being through the stressful times.

Setting up WTC is one of the best opportunities I have ever had. It is hard work, and the team that makes the council such a success, the staff, partners, councillors and residents, are getting the council they deserve - a modern, responsive, positive and committed team, working together for Weymouth.

Jane Biscombe FSLCC
Town Clerk to Weymouth Town Council, 2018-Current

First published in NALC's LCR Summer 2020 magazine