

**NOTES OF THE ANNUAL MEETING BETWEEN REPRESENTATIVES OF
NORTH WARWICKSHIRE BOROUGH COUNCIL
AND TOWN AND PARISH COUNCILS IN THE BOROUGH**

Held on Tuesday, 15 January 2013 at the Council House, South Street, Atherstone.

Present: Councillor M Stanley, Leader of North Warwickshire Borough Council
in the Chair.

Members and Officers from North Warwickshire Borough Council and representatives from the following Town/Parish Councils:

Ansley, Atherstone, Austrey, Baddesley Ensor, Baxterley, Curdworth, Fillongley, Hartshill, Lea Marson, Mancetter, Middleton, Nether Whitacre, Newton Regis, Seckington and No Mans Heath, Over Whitacre and Polesworth.

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor M Davis, Bryan Hamson and Jean Marshall (Mancetter Parish Council).

1 Minutes of the meeting held on 10 January 2012

The minutes of the meeting held on 10 January 2012 were received and noted.

2 Matters Arising

None.

3 Finance

Chris Brewer, Deputy Chief Executive, provided an update regarding the current financial situation affecting the Borough Council. He explained that the amount of grant from central government has been reducing each year and so far the Borough Council has lost £1.7m in funding. Lengthy discussion was held about a number of the issues raised in his presentation, particularly about Council Tax precepts.

A copy of the presentation is appended to these notes.

4 Welfare Changes

Bob Trahern, Assistant Chief Executive (Community Services) provided an update about the various welfare changes arising from the Welfare Reform Act affecting some residents within North Warwickshire.

A change that will affect many North Warwickshire Borough Council customers will come from alterations to the way Housing Benefit payments

are to be made in future. In many cases this will remove the option of having benefits paid directly to NWBC. If residents are entitled to housing benefit in future this will be included in the total amount of benefit and this will be paid directly to the claimant. They will then become responsible for making sure that this part of their income pays their rent on time to avoid falling into arrears and putting their tenancy and home at risk.

The same Welfare Reform Act will also bring in a new size criteria or 'bedroom tax' in the social rented sector which includes tenancies where the household contains working age adults. This reform will cut the amount of Housing Benefit payable to somebody if they are "under-occupying" their home. Rules will be introduced that set out how much benefit will be lost and in what circumstances. This change and the introduction of the bedroom tax will not affect households that contain somebody of pensionable age.

Bob went on to explain that a number of 'Wraparound' events are being scheduled across the hubs within North Warwickshire aimed at helping any residents affected by the changes. At these events staff will be available from housing, council tax, benefits and community development teams who will be able to talk to residents about the changes, and the effects they may have on them. At some of the events partner organisations such as Citizens Advice Bureau, The Volunteer Centre, Coventry and Warwickshire Cooperative Development Agency, The Fire Service, Act on Energy, Adult and Community Learning, Numidia and the Family Information Service will also be on hand to offer advice as necessary.

A copy of Bob's presentation is appended to the notes.

5 Area Forums

Steve Maxey, Assistant Chief Executive and Solicitor to the Council, informed the meeting that the Borough Council are currently examining ways of improving the style and effectiveness of the Area Fora and invited opinion on how to address this issue. The following suggestions were made by various representatives at the meeting:

- Extended surgery time with smaller agenda items;
- Geographically smaller;
- One presentation each meeting is enough;
- Prefer to receive the Police statistics in paper format, not just verbatim;
- Better consultation;
- Items relevant to the community rather than generic; and
- Planning issues could be discussed at the forums.

Steve thanked the group for their suggestions and would report back with further information as soon as it is available.

6 Core Strategy

Steve Maxey gave a brief outline on the current situation in connection with the Core Strategy and explained that it is currently being finalised and it should be submitted for examination by the end of February 2013.

Discussion was held about Neighbourhood Planning and whether any funding was available for their formulation. Steve replied that some limited funding is available and details would be appended to the minutes. Any specific advice about the production of Neighbourhood Plans should be directed to Dorothy Barratt (dorothybarratt@northwarks.gov.uk).

7 Portas

Steve reported that £100,000 grant has been received from the government to support regeneration initiatives for the high street. It has been decided to target the towns of Polesworth, Coleshill and Atherstone and groups are currently being arranged to look at the most beneficial way of using the money in the various areas. Lorna Ferguson explained that Warwick University have set up a small business unit who can look at media development and this may be useful resource. Lorna to forward details to Steve Maxey.

8 Questions from Mancetter Parish Council:

- In light of the fact that the Borough Council needs to meet the shortfall of funding due to the Council Tax reforms are lists available of:
 - i Statutory services which the Borough Council must provide; and
 - ii Services which the Borough Council currently provide that, as a result of cuts, responsibility may be passed to Parish Councils?

Steve responded that in answer to (i) statutory services would encompass Housing, Planning, Environmental Health, Council Tax, Emergency Planning amongst others. Steve went on to state that at present there are no plans to pass any services over to the responsibility of Parish Councils just because of the cuts but that the Council would look at the business case for any change in services.

- Having seen a feature on Country file regarding the massive damage that may be caused to trees by disease and bugs transferred from the continent by infected imports/contamination by local walkers etc can the Borough Council advise what measures are being taken to prevent/restrict the spread of diseases affecting Ash, Juniper and many other tree species? Any plans will need to take consideration of plant movements and decontamination points for walkers on footpaths in and around the Borough/County Boundaries.

Steve replied that at present Defra (Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs), have only six reported cases affecting Ash trees.

Further information, including a pictorial guide to symptoms, is available at www.forestry.gov.uk/chalara. Suspected cases of Chalara should be reported to one of the following:

Forest Research Tree Health Diagnostic and Advisory Service – 01420 23000

Forestry Commission Plant Health Service – 0131 314 6414

Fera Plant Health and Seeds Inspectorate – 01904 465625

Representatives from Town and Parish Councils present were invited to raise issues pertaining to their Council.

The meeting closed at 8.45 pm.