

COMMUNITY GOVERNANCE REVIEW

Norton Radstock Town Council has considered the Town council's position in relation to the Governance Review and can see no justification for a change in the current Governance arrangements for the Norton Radstock area. It is sincerely believed that this view is borne out by the minimal attendances at each of the meetings called to discuss the proposals. None of the meetings produced an attendance of even 1% of the electorate, suggesting that there is little interest in changing the status quo.

The Town Council is conscious that the it has undergone a difficult period in recent years, but wishes to place on record the positive actions that have been put in place over the last 9 months. In order to ensure that the Council progresses to its aim of gaining Quality Council status, it has comprehensively reviewed its systems and put in place new policies which will ensure greater efficiency.

New policies adopted include:-

- New Standing Orders
- New Financial Regulations
- A Scheme of Delegation
- A Code of Corporate Governance
- A Guide to Procurement
- A Member and Employee Protocol

In addition the Town Council produced its first ever Corporate Performance Plan and is currently engaged in producing its second plan, which will clearly set out its aims and objectives for the future.

In the period, the Town Council has significantly broadened its base in the community, increasing its participation in the In Bloom initiatives which have been so magnificently led by local organisations and individuals. It has started the ball rolling to become similarly involved in a Christmas lighting initiative for the Parish.

The Town Council has also strived to improve community cohesion by actively seeking to build relationships and work in partnership with other groups such as the Somer Valley Partnership, the Chamber of Commerce and Bath and North East Somerset Council.

With regard to achieving Quality Local Council status, the Town Council believes it has made significant steps towards its target, following the appointment of a Town Clerk who already holds the required Certificate in Local Council Administration (CILCA). Towards the goal of Quality Status, the Town Council engaged a consultant who served on the panel which awards Quality Status in Gloucestershire, in order to advise on areas where improvements could be effected.

The Town Council's standing on the relevant tests which lead to the Quality Council Award is as follows:-

Test 1: Electoral Mandate

Currently the Town Council would not qualify under this section due to the number of Councillors who are co-opted rather than elected. However it is the intention of existing Members to ensure that every seat would be contested in the election due to be held next year. Indeed it is hoped that those few people currently leading the campaign to split the Town Council, will be encouraged to stand as prospective Councillors in that election.

It is worth noting that if the existing Council was split into three smaller units considerably more Councillors/candidates would be needed than is currently the case.

Test 2:

The Council has recruited a qualified Clerk which means that this Test is completed.

Test 3: Council meetings

The Council already complies with this initiative in every way.

Test 4: Communication and Community Engagement

Mandatory Section – The Town Council already qualifies under this Section, meeting the criteria. It has:-

- A website;
- An Email address;
- A regular newsletter - which will be produced four times a year – note- two have already been produced this year;
- Contact names within the newsletter ;
- The Annual Report will be produced following the Town meeting and will be included within the next edition of the newsletter which will be circulated to every house in the parish.

Discretionary Section –

To qualify under the discretionary section the Town Council needs to meet 9 of 17 discretionary requirements. It already meets in excess of that number and aims to eventually meet every one of these requirements which relates to this parish.

Test 5 Annual Report

This report must be completed and published by the 30th June and the Town Council will meet this requirement and will not only make it available for inspection by any elector, but will circulate it to every household.

Test 6 Accountability

This section deals with the Council's Statement of Accounts, requiring it to receive an unqualified opinion from the external auditor. The Town Council meets with the requirements.

Test 7

The Council has formally adopted the Code of Conduct in accordance with the Local Government Act 2000 and as revised, and therefore meets this test.

Test 8 Promoting Local Democracy and Citizenship

The Town Council meets these requirements fully.

Test 9 Terms and Conditions

The Town Council meets these requirements which relate to the employment of its staff.

Test 10 Training

The Town Council believes in providing comprehensive training for both Members and Officers. Only recently the Town Council employed a Principal Lecturer from the Department of Natural and Social Sciences from the University of Gloucestershire to facilitate an Away Day. The Lecturer works at a high level with the Society of Local Council Clerks and the National Association of Local Councils.

Members were interested to note that in a discussion on the Governance Review, the facilitator had felt it was **"strange to be discussing the break-up of a parish at a time when her own experience nationally, was that parishes were combining to form larger units."**

SUMMARY

Some of the work undertaken by the Town Council is set out in the newsletter attached, which was circulated to every house in the Parish with the intention of providing information, which would help those undertaking the Governance Review. It can be seen that the work is extensive, involving the community in its activities and seeking to make all parts of the parish a better place to live.

The Town Council is seeking to move all the communities forward and is currently expanding its association with community groups. Not only does it wish to provide extensive funding for the groups, but also to assist them on a day to day basis wherever possible.

In the current year it is replacing two play parks and providing two bike tracks, grant aiding the skate park at Gullock Tynning, replacing a pavilion at Norton Hill and seeking to provide additional allotments throughout the parish. But those are just the major works. Equally important is its work on In Bloom and Christmas lights and the day to day maintenance of its street furniture.

The working party is most conscious that the three public meetings called for the purpose of discussing the future of the Town Council within the Community Governance Review, were acrimonious but were very sparsely attended. Whilst Members are conscious that those present are entitled to their view, however different it may be from that expressed by Members, it was noticeable that almost all of the complaints raised by those present were matters which were the responsibility of B&NES Council. In making that statement no criticism of that body by the Town Council is intended, but it is important to flag up that fact.

The Town Council is not perfect, but it does genuinely seek to work with local people at a local level and to do so as economically as possible. It is not believed that splitting the area into three separate statutory bodies would increase the efficiency or effectiveness of governance within the area. Administration costs would rise significantly as the three bodies operating democratically would require three times the number of meetings which are currently held. Local organisations seeking Grant Aid would need to make three applications which would be considered by three sets of Members, and local people would undoubtedly be confused as to which body should be contacted in many cases.

The Council is also conscious of the impact on Town Council staff, some of whom have worked for the community for many years. The irony is that the hardship suffered by this Group would be matched by an undoubted impact on the taxpayers who would be funding three separate bodies in the event of a split.

This would also be an unintended division within community groups which currently work within the whole area, rather than individual sections. In some cases this could lead to the break-up of a currently efficient organisation.

The Council makes representation to the Governance Review Working Party on the basis that no change should be made to existing Governance arrangements.