

Community Engagement

Councillor Andrew Grant – Conservatives Member for Hackleton & Grange Park ward	Councillor Jonathan Harris – Liberal Democrats Member for Brixworth ward	Councillor Keith Holland- Delamere – Labour Member for Billing & Rectory Farm ward	Councillor Ken Pritchard – Conservative Member for Deanshanger ward	Councillor Daniel Cribbin – Conservative Member for Moulton ward
In general terms how do councillors carry out their representational role with electors?				
<p>We are active in our communities and attend various functions and events. Telephone and email is also a significant way of dealing with issues in our areas.</p> <p>Attendance at Parish Council Meetings.</p>	<p>I have worked hard to raise my profile, and through newsletters and social media, my contact details are available to all. I have dogs and I walk them every day within Brixworth (which is the largest populous within the ward). I invariably interact with residents almost every time I do this.</p> <p>There are councillors and councillors - my approach is to be recognisable, proactive and accessible rather than just wait for case work to arrive.</p> <p>We do regular targeted community surveys across the ward to identify local issues. This provides the information to work with Parish Councils where possible or to take a progressive approach to issues that need resolving. This enables me to identify patterns and priorities across the ward. Examples of this include rural transport/</p>	<p>The key factors are in relation mainly to the urban areas, particularly the poorer areas. It is not just about Councillors signposting people to services etc., but there is an element of having to guide them through it, which takes time, often having to repeat it. In these areas, there are more housing, street scene, fly tipping, anti-social behaviour, planning issues in particular in relation to HIMO issues that the ward Councillors have to deal with too.</p> <p>Due to the diversity of the urban communities' extra time is spent on asylum applications, domestic abuse and modern slavery issues.</p>		

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	<p>connectivity, the looming cost of living crisis which is already indicating wider cases of hardship and the possible requirement for a community larder, even in this rural area, the isolation of the elderly and greater opportunity for active travel connectivity (cycling/ walking etc.), climate and environmental issues such as clean air, protection of green space and the climate emergency.</p>			
<p>Does the council have area committees and what are their powers?</p>				
<p>The Council does not currently have area committees, localism arrangements are addressed in the main report.</p>				
<p>How do councillors seek to engage with their constituents? Do they hold surgeries, send newsletters, hold public meetings or maintain blogs?</p>				
<p>We contribute regular information to parish magazines which are delivered to all properties in the area. We use Social Media i.e. Facebook.</p> <p>Councillors regularly hold surgeries and attend senior clubs.</p> <p>Many councillors also represent WNC outside bodies on top of council meetings and various allocated committees. I have 3 parish councils in my patch. Also, I work and meet with</p>	<p>Facebook page.</p> <p>'Live' listening posts (been on hold since COVID times).</p> <p>Newsletters to all doors 3 - 4 times a year, additional ad hoc newsletters for particular issues within communities.</p> <p>Update posts providing council information on village Facebook pages (announcements/grant schemes or applications processes / COVID information.</p> <p>Councillor website page.</p>	<p>Councillors engage with constituents in various ways. In some areas surgeries work. Labour group councillors do send out newsletters and many use social media to communicate.</p>		<p>In my Ward we do not hold regular surgeries, but all legacy Daventry area councillors do link in with the local MP and attend action days across the WNC area. There are surgeries held across the legacy DDC area and regular coffee mornings with the MP and Councillors. The aim is to have one or two a month across the area. This is a relatively new initiative which links in our MP and ward Councillors as we find this gets a better</p>

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<p>local PCSO's on a regular basis.</p>	<p>Parish newsletter to Parish Councils and Meetings. Annual Councillor report to parishes</p> <p>Councillor Annual report to all doors</p> <p>1-1 liaison with Parish Clerks and Chairs</p>			<p>attendance and is of more benefit to our residents.</p> <p>We attend our parish councils when we can. My ward has 12 parish councils and we split our time between these. In my ward each Councillor has been allocated their own villages as a primary contact point. We then pick up the majority of issues in that area.</p> <p>Collectively we all will pick up issues for all areas, but we publicise a particular Councillor for an area so as to maintain a strong personal link for our villages. This is easier to do in our ward as we are all from one political party. In wards where there are members from different parties this is more difficult to achieve thus putting more of a burden on each councillor in terms of workload.</p> <p>We actively publicise our contact details to each parish/village and our door is always open. We are in</p>
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				<p>regular contact with each parish - often daily discussing local issues with them.</p> <p>Our details are published in local village magazines resulting in the ability for residents to contact us when needed.</p>
<p>Are there any mechanisms in place that help councillors interact with young people, those not on the electoral register, and/or other minority groups and their representative bodies?</p>				
<p>A Youth committee is being set up and will give all councillors the opportunity to engage with young people. Many councillors have close connections with minority groups depending on the area they represent.</p>	<p>There are very few minority groups within this ward. Our biggest challenge is interacting with young people and working and engaging with younger members of the community – it is clearly an area we intend to focus on.</p> <p>Some Parishes are considering Youth Councils, and this is an area I believe I can support them to implement.</p>	<p>A number of our Labour Group have good working relationships with various youth work organisations, minority group umbrella organisations for example, the Northampton Bangladeshi Association, Northampton Town of Sanctuary, the Association of Northamptonshire Supplementary Schools and the Somali community. Our group is diverse, and this helps with how we engage with harder to reach communities.</p>	<p>Parish Meetings – Old Stratford, Wicken, Deanshanger- monthly meetings which last about 2-3 hours plus preparation and travel.</p> <p>Members will attend meetings if asked to and help as needed.</p>	<p>We link in with our parish councils who often have links with these groups. For example in Moulton the Parish Council is very good in catering for young people and other minority groups through the Community Centre and Local Community Connector scheme. As Councillors we actively support this and promote these services to those in the area and also showcase these services with WNC.</p>
<p>Are councillors expected to attend community meetings, such as parish or resident’s association meetings? If so, what is their level of involvement and what roles do they play?</p>				
	<p>There are no specific expectations however, I attend as many Parish Councils and Parish Meetings as I can. For example, I estimate I have</p>	<p>Whenever they can our councillors do attend residents’ meetings and where there are Parish Council meetings. With some</p>		<p>We attend our parishes when we can (we have 12 parishes in our ward. It is often difficult to attend every meeting as often</p>

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	<p>attended over forty of these meetings in the 12 months since the start of WNC. I fundamentally believe that my role as a Councillor is to act as a connector for parishes and parish conceals and to join up the dots, share knowledge, experience, and ideas from around the ward.</p> <p>I have facilitated residents' meetings - for example with Futures Group regarding social housing issues.</p> <p>I have also organised Parish Council and West Northants Officer meetings on specific issues. (EG Spatial Consultation).</p> <p>Actively involved in COVID Volunteer Support - identification and co-ordination of volunteers (110 volunteers during peak COVID lockdown period).</p> <p>Active involvement in Homes for Ukraine - liaising with Council and Hosts as well as the establishment of an outreach hub at Brixworth Library.</p>	<p>residents' groups they struggle with participation and a lot of the engagement is via social media. Rejuvenating these groups is a great need.</p>		<p>they fall on the same evening or clash with other council or personal commitments). Our involvement will be listening to local issues and concerns and giving advice about how to solve these based on our extensive knowledge of how local government works.</p> <p>We are all very experienced councillors with over 20 years' experience each. We will feed back to WNC any issues which need to be followed up.</p>
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	<p>An understanding of, and engagement with the community, allowed for the full allocation of the COVID support grant in a timely and focused way.</p>			
<p>Explain your approach to the Area Governance structure. Is your Area Governance a decision-making forum or an advisory board? What is their relationship with locally elected members and Community bodies such as Town and Parish Councils?</p>				
<p>As elected councillors, we all have a number of Parish Councils or town councils within our ward.</p> <p>Council Colleagues - we attend all meetings to report on the work of the Council both locally and District wide. Taking questions and dealing with issues which may arise.</p>	<p>I take a proactive role in providing information to Parish Councils and Parish Meetings. There is no specific area governance in this ward.</p> <p>I take the perspective that a ward councillor should not just respond to case work and enquiries but rather take a more strategic view to progressively identify and change/champion specific areas of challenge for the ward. For example, the Brixworth ward is extremely rural and there are major challenges regarding public transport and the isolation of older people. I have worked with a local community bus provider and during the last year have re connected 4 villages with a once a fortnight or once a week in the instance of Scaldwell, community bus service.</p>	<p>A number of the Labour Group are also Town Councillors. They also work closely with colleagues who are just Town or Parish Councillors.</p>		<p>The Council does not currently have area committees but Daventry District did have an area committee type group working in the Moulton Ward which met with officers and parish councils to discuss issues relating to planning and highways and other related issues as a result of the new SUE's being built in the ward. This arrangement is currently being considered by WNC with this DDC group being used as a template for future area committees.</p> <p>I was Chairman of the legacy Daventry Standards Committee for many years and I often gave advice to local parish councils about governance issues that arose in my ward.</p>

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Looking forward how could they be improved to enhance decision-making?

As a council we could perhaps involve our parishes more with regard to governance. Having said that NCALC does give good advice to parishes. Issues relating to governance of parishes will fall to WNC and the monitoring officer to resolve initially. To date as members we have not had any issues to deal with on the Democracy and standards committee.

Other

Full Council - Northampton
4/5 per year, last about
3/4 hours plus preparation
and travel to
Northampton.

Northamptonshire Police
Crime and Fire Panel - 4/5
meetings per year – last
about 4 hours plus
preparation and travel to
Northampton.

Northamptonshire PCFP-
Commissioners Complaints
Hearings max 2 per year,
last about 2 hours, plus
prep and travel to
Northampton.

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			<p>Overview and Scrutiny Committee - 4/5 meetings per year - last 2+ hours plus prep and travel to Northampton.</p> <p>Pension Board- 4 meetings per year, last about 2/3 hours plus preparation, on Zoom.</p> <p>Local Area Planning Committee - (Vice Chair) Monthly Meetings. last approx. 2/3 hours plus Preparation and travel to Towcester.</p> <p>Plus, briefings previous days last about 1 to 2 hours plus plus any site visits.</p> <p>Substitute at meetings 4/5 per year, average length 3 hours.</p> <p>By choice I do try and attend part of the Cabinet meetings each month for 1 to 2 hours on specific subjects to 'keep abreast' of what is happening.</p>	
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			Adhoc meetings and visits since Jan 1 till 30th April number 17+.	
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Casework

How do councillors deal with their casework? Do they pass it on to council officers? Or do they take a more in-depth approach to resolving issues?

Through Officers, MP's, NHS as necessary to get a satisfied outcome.	I take the approach that if I can deal with the issue directly then that is what I shall do. There are of course instances where officer engagement is required to achieve resolution. I take the view that the building of productive and professional relationships with officers in key directorates is invaluable. As a group we hold 6 - 8 weekly meetings with the most senior heads of functional directorates to review broader issues that may be emerging from casework (pattern identification) and also to deal with any outstanding casework.	Although the Councillors have the same number of electors to other wards, the workload in these areas is heavy. A key role is helping people to navigate the system and having to explain this a number of times which takes time.	Case Work Last year dealing with Floods, Bus, Planning, Gigaclear problems plus other various issues – approx. 2 Hours per week. Training – Pensions, Planning etc all via Zoom etc. Spatial Strategy – Dealing with members' numerous enquiries and this is ongoing.	I have a hybrid approach to case work. We have a members enquiry email which I will send issues through to for follow up in most cases where the issue is complex. This is of great benefit to me. However, the results do not always provide an adequate response for the resident and further follow up and personal intervention is often needed. Therefore I find a more personalised approach of telephoning officers works. If the issue is a simple one then I will often deal with it without involving members enquiries. With over 20 years' experience as a Councillor often matters can we
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				easily dealt with without too much involvement of the council just by using local knowledge.
What support do members receive?				
A central system of recording and being passed to officers to answer the issues raised.	Support is generally good from Council officers if relationships are built.			Member's enquiry email. Political assistant
How has technology influenced the way in which councillors work? And interact with their electorate?				
We need to be flexible in using all types of communication, so all groups feel part of the Council in how they are dealt with.	<p>The option of hybrid meetings is crucial and should be maintained (as per during the pandemic) and ideally enhanced.</p> <p>My personal view is that the legislation that allowed for remote access to committees during the pandemic should not have been removed as it provided greater access, particularly for councillors who work full-time, to be able to join from remote locations. It has been extremely useful from a resident point of view as video calls are now the norm for a large number of people and this has meant greater access to residents without the need for face-to-face meetings or surgeries.</p> <p>A concern the still exists however is that there are many, particularly some senior</p>	Still an area that needs developing. We are fully aware that there are those who do not engage with technology or are digitally excluded due to living conditions/ affordability		Email and zoom meetings have really helped in the past 2 years. However, this is no substitute for face-to-face meetings and getting out there and seeing residents.

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	<p>residents, who do not have access to the internet. What I would like to see is a restoration of outreach services in libraries where councillors can be present and supported by officers - for at least once a week for several hours. To facilitate this, it may be necessary to provide flexible times such as out of office hours.</p>			
<p>In what ways does the council promote service users' engagement/dispute resolution with service providers and managers rather than through councillors?</p>				
	<p>There is a heavy reliance on Twitter and Facebook for the provision of announcements e.g., grant applications which specifically precludes accessibility for many.</p> <p>There is a heavy requirement on online accessibility and the reliance on the ability to complete online forms.</p> <p>Street doctor has been in existence for many years and despite constant reminder from residents there is either a reluctance to use the system or a lack of ability to do so.</p>			<p>Not aware of how we do this. For officers to explain more fully. We certainly as members do seem to get involved in a lot of issues which WNC could deal with at a more "Council" level.</p>