



*SERVING LOCAL COUNCILS IN SHROPSHIRE AND TELFORD & WREKIN*

*Affiliated to the National Association of Local Councils*

## **Report to Local Joint Committees – Elections for Parish and Town Councils, May, 2013**

**Summary:** This report to LJs is primarily to raise awareness of the work Shropshire Association of Local Councils (SALC) is undertaking with both the Elections and Communications & Engagement Teams at Shropshire Council to raise public awareness of the forthcoming elections to elect councillors to some or all 153 parish and town council in the Shropshire Council area and to encourage people to stand for election.

**Background:** Shropshire Association of Local Councils (SALC) is the local arm of NALC (the National Association of Local Councils), the only national organisation, that represents parish and town councils who are in membership. NALC is the local councils' lobbying body for national government and its agencies and at local level, SALC liaises with Shropshire Council (SC) to strengthen and improve communications between the tiers of local government and promote partnership working through regular meetings between its Executive Committee Members and Shropshire Council's Portfolio holders for Flourishing Shropshire Communities and Regeneration of Market Towns. As there are also for both local councils and to Shropshire Council, there is some opportunity for joint working.

**Recommendations:** To note the programme of work SALC is undertaking on the run up to the Elections, information that is available and being communicated together with relevant contact details.

### **1. Aims and Objectives**

Our main aim is to promote a thriving local council sector in Shropshire, where local people feel engaged in and empowered by local democracy. SALC's Executive Committee has at its meeting on 14 January approved a programme of work in which the team at SALC will be undertaking in the lead up to the elections on Thursday 2 May 2013. SALC's objectives will be:

- To work with both the Elections and Communications & Engagement Teams, SC, in the election process in accordance with legislation and the requirements of the Electoral Commission.
- To assist member local council clerks in the election process and timetable
- To encourage people to stand for election
- To raise public awareness of the elections process in standing for election
- To promote the work of local councils and the opportunities to make a difference in communities (particularly in respect of planning powers, community infrastructure levy, the increasing delivery of services at a local level, place plans and their influence in what gets done locally).

### **2. Raising Awareness and Information**

#### **2.1 Information Bulletins**

Weekly Information Bulletins are issued by SALC to its member councils and these contain regular updates on the elections. The Elections Team, SC are also

producing Elections Bulletins for Parish Clerks and these are distributed with the SALC Bulletin (eg: Issue 1 which includes the Elections Timetable and information about Nomination Packs) has been sent out with the SALC Bulletin of 18 January and is at Appendix A)

## **2.2 Events**

Information will be presented at the following SALC Area Committees:

- 22 January - North Shropshire
- 31 January - Oswestry
- 11 February - South Shropshire Area Committee
- 20 February - Bridgnorth Area Committee
- 19 March - Shrewsbury

Both member and non-member local councils are welcome to attend. The Area Committee Secretaries will be providing information to local councils within their area in due course.

## **2.3 Other Events**

The Voluntary Community Sector Assembly is holding the following event, at which SALC will be in attendance to provide information.

- Voluntary and Community Sector Market Place Day 24<sup>th</sup> January, 10am – 2pm, Shirehall.

SALC will be supporting the SLCC event taking place at the Greenhous Meadow on 15 February aimed at preparing clerks for new council members. To assist clerks, SALC will present a 'New Members Induction Pack', which will act as an on-going reference guide.

SALC will attend any other events where appropriate as these are arranged and will respond to specific requests from local councils.

## **2.4. Market Towns**

SALC is aiming to have a presence to provide information at forthcoming local markets/farmers markets. Dates and details have yet to be finalised but it is anticipated this will be during the period 18 February to 8 March.

## **3. Key facts and information**

### **3.1 What Parish Councils do**

Parish Councils are an essential part of local democracy at grass roots level and have a vital role in acting on behalf of communities they represent by:

- giving views, on behalf of the community, on planning applications and other proposals that affect their area
- undertaking projects and schemes that benefit local residents
- working in partnership with other bodies to achieve benefits for the parish
- alerting relevant authorities to problems that arise or work needing to be done

### **3.2 Quality Parish Councils**

The Government introduced the Quality Parish Council Scheme in 2003 with the aim of encouraging councils, on behalf of their communities, with powers (which is now the Power of General Competence) enabling them to have a greater say in the

running and improvement of local services. In order to achieve 'Quality' status, parish councils need 2/3rds of their councillors to have been elected.

If the number of seats on a council matches the number of candidates, then there isn't usually a vote. If more people are encouraged to stand for election, then the chances of there being a contested election are improved which in turn reinforces the democratic mandate of successful candidates.

### 3.3 Power of General Competence

The Localism Act includes a 'general power of competence'. It gives local authorities the legal capacity to do anything that an individual can do that is not specifically prohibited. The general power gives councils more freedom to work together with others in new ways to drive down costs and increase their confidence to do creative, innovative things to meet local people's needs.

To qualify as an "eligible parish council", a parish council in England must meet conditions prescribed by the Secretary of State in the Parish Councils (General Power of Competence) (Prescribed Conditions) Order 2012. This Order says that, to be eligible to use the General Power of Competence, parish councils must meet the following conditions:

*1. The council has resolved at a meeting of the council and each subsequent relevant annual meeting that it meets the conditions in paragraph 2 below.*

*2. At the time a resolution under paragraph 1 is passed—*

*(a) the number of members of the council that have been declared to be elected, whether at ordinary elections or at a by-election, is equal to or greater than two-thirds of the total number of members of the council;*

*(b) the clerk to the parish councils holds one of the following—*

*(i) the Certificate in Local Council Administration;*

*(ii) the Certificate of Higher Education in Local Policy;*

*(iii) the Certificate of Higher Education in Local Council Administration; or*

*(iv) the first level of the foundation degree in Community Engagement and Governance awarded by the University of Gloucestershire or its successor; and*

*3. The clerk to the parish council has completed the relevant training, unless such training was required for the purpose of obtaining a certificate of a description mentioned in paragraph (b).*

***For the purposes of this paragraph "relevant training" means—***

*(a) in the exercise of the general power;*

*(b) provided in accordance with the national training strategy for parish councils adopted by the National Association of Local Councils and Commission for Rural Communities, as revised from time to time.*

*4. If a parish council resolves that that it meets the prescribed conditions, it shall be an eligible parish council for the duration of the eligibility period, ie it shall be eligible to use the General Power from the time that the resolution is passed until the day of the next annual meeting of that parish council (held after the resolution is passed) that takes place in a year of ordinary elections (the 'relevant annual meeting').*

### 3.4 Election Costs

The Elections Manager, SC, has confirmed that the costs remain unchanged from those agreed in 2009, namely

- at any combined election involving a parish/town council (i.e. with a unitary election), the parish council shall only be required to pay the additional cost

relating solely to its local election or if not combined at a rate of £2 per elector, or actual cost whichever is the lesser

- any costs incurred shall be deferred to the following financial year to enable local councils to precept for the appropriate amount
- a charge of £100 for uncontested elections

### **3.5 Support for Parish Clerks**

In addition to regular bulletins previously mentioned, a Clerk's Quick and Easy Guide to Elections will also be made available.

## **4. Communications**

SALC meets regularly with the Elections and Communications & Engagement Teams, SC, to ensure it is included in promoting the elections through various communication/media channels identified in SC's Communications and Engagement Plan.

The following information is also available on both the SALC and SC websites (links are included):

- Elections Timetable
- Nomination Process and Key Dates
- Town and Parishes with their wards and electorate totals
- NALC booklets 'All about Local Councils' and 'It takes all sorts' (what parish councils do and the role of a parish councillor)
- NALC Elections poster

In addition to the electronic bulletins referred to earlier, SALC will be placing an advert on 'Facebook' that targets people in Shropshire, an elections Twitter account and a YouTube video which captures the experiences of existing local councillors.

## **5. Appendix**

Elections Bulletin for Parish Clerks, Issue 1 (which includes the elections timetable)

For further information about the information in this report or if you want copies of the material referred to, contact the SALC Team, details below or visit:

<http://www.2shrop.net/2shropnet/AToZOfMini-sites/A/Alc/Elections2013>

or

<http://www.shropshire.gov.uk/democracy.nsf/open/495DA3312EA52E8680257ADA003A4582>

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