

## Questions / Statement for the Local Council Liaison Committee agenda November

As recorded in the minutes of the February 2024 meeting, the EFDC Local Council Liaison committee is classed as an 'outside body' with no decision making powers, but is instead a committee to discuss items of mutual interest. This committee meets twice per year.

There is of course a place for this committee in terms of information sharing, and it is democratically elected Councillors accountable to the public who should be attending the Local Council Liaison Committee meetings, however the committee in of itself does not fulfil a vital function which the majority of Parish and Town Council Clerks in the Epping Forest District state is essential, and missing. It is the Clerks (and staff) who manage the day to day functions of the individual parishes in Epping Forest. The now out of date District Council and Local Council Charter (latest revision 2016) sets out that the Charter should emphasise the importance attached to the Local and District Councils **working in partnership in the provision of services to the public**. It was also designed to **enhance and enrich communications between these bodies**.

Since this time, the District Councils mode of operation has changed, with more of a corporate style of operation adopted, resulting in an ever-growing chasm or void between the District and Parish and Town Councils in terms of day-to-day function and administration. Direct contact details are no longer provided to Parish and Town Councils which results in unnecessary delays and barriers being placed between these two parties, who let's remember are supposed to have '**enhanced communications**'. This lack of ability to have direct contact and communication with officers at EFDC is having a detrimental effect on the ability of Parish and Town Councils to deal with certain issues and enquiries efficiently. For example, a query which could be resolved by a 1 minute phone call or is urgent in nature, could now take up to 10 days to resolve.

There is a clear difference between political and practical elements of how a Parish / Town Council operates. The Local Council Liaison Committee is a political mechanism, allowing the sharing and exchange of information, but what is missing is the practical element of communication between these two levels of Government.

Consideration is currently underway as to how best organise the Epping Forest Town and Parish Council Association (previously the Epping Forest Branch of the EALC). It is also expected that a separate Epping Forest Clerks Forum will be created where operational matters relating to Parish and Town Councils can be discussed. Whilst these are being considered, Parish and Town Councils would like Epping Forest District Council to respond to the following:

1. Can EFDC clarify what an 'outside body' means in relation to the Local Council Liaison committee, given that the committee is managed by EFDC Officers, and chaired by an elected representative of EFDC?
2. Will EFDC commit to providing an updated Parish and Town Council Charter, setting out how it sees the relationship between these layers of local government, and how communication between these two bodies works (from both political and practical perspectives)?

3. Parish and Town Council Clerks would like an improved mechanism by which they can contact officers at EFDC to resolve problems, issues, or ask questions. Will EFDC commit to:
  - a. providing a dedicated Parish / Town Council contact at EFDC responsible for dealing with Parish Council issues on a day to day basis; and
  - b. providing an electronic list of direct contact details for officers and heads of departments at EFDC and their responsibilities?
4. Will the Leader of the Council agree to meet with Parish and Town Council Clerks at least three times per year, to discuss issues or concerns of an operational nature?
5. What measures will EFDC put in place to improve communication between the District and Parish / Town Councils, and ensure this contact is maintained?
6. By what methods will EFDC accept questions to be placed on the Local Council Liaison Committee agenda (Individual Councils? Individual Councillors? One nominated person? Etc).

This statement has the support of 20 of the 23 currently employed Clerks in the Epping Forest District (one Council currently without a Clerk). Epping Forest District should see this as a clear indication that the notion of a **'partnership'** relationship existing between these two parties has long since gone, but remains something that Parish and Town Councils place great importance upon. Without commitment and action from EFDC, this relationship will not be possible.

The Local Government Associations publication entitled ***Councillor workbook: working with town and parish councils*** states the following:

*“They are democratically elected and represent some 16 million people across the country. They also perform a number of important roles: as providers and supporters of services; as signposts and access points to services; as representatives and community leaders. Many ward councillors place great value in having good relationships with their parish tier and see working closely with town and parish councillors as important for gathering local intelligence..... town and parish councils can be invaluable allies for all aspects of your ward councillor role.”*