

CLERKS REPORT

WALBERSWICK PARISH COUNCIL

Achievements and Activities

1. Began work with the P.I.R.
2. Worked through the accounts for 2015/16.
3. Completed the Internal Audit
4. Contacted Water supplier regarding the bills outstanding
5. Worked through the 2016 versions of Code of Conduct, Financial Regulations & Standing orders
6. Brought the finances for 2016/17 up to date, including bank reconciliation
7. Started to sort out the files – about 10% through
8. Set up email account
9. Worked with Highways to develop a statement regarding the 20MPH proposal
10. Read and responded to some of the correspondence

Review of the Current Situation.

I have spent a lot of time in the last couple of weeks including evenings and Sunday reviewing the status of Walberwick Parish Council from a Clerk and RFO point of view. In short, in my opinion, the situation is untenable.

There are serious shortcomings in the council procedures. I could provide a long list but in summary:

- There is no robust book keeping process and internal controls are completely absent
- The Audit and the Public Interest report require completion, and action plans drawn up and monitored.
- There are deficiencies in the records kept & management of those records including minutes, working papers and agendas
- Every policy or code such as Financial Regs., Code of Conduct, model publications, is either out of date or there is no evidence that they were ever adopted.
- The process of monitoring and processing planning applications is absent.
- There are issues with the running of the Heritage Hut, the Allotments and the playground which need to be addressed.
- There may be some work to be done with the playing fields.
- The web site is working as a member of the parish keeps it up to date however, she has already made it very clear that this needs to be passed back to the Clerk.

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On top of which is also the continuous bombardment of correspondence. On Monday (today) I had received 7 emails alone from one individual, all of which demanded that I responded or engaged in some action.

The root cause for this is **entirely** down to the continuous turnover of new Clerks/RFO's and more importantly, for the last 15 months, no Clerk/RFO at all. The reasons for this excessive staff turnover are well known and can be seen in the resignation letters on the web site. However, the consequence is that the fundamental elements have disintegrated. It is like a house that has been abandoned for many years and has started to fall apart. I wish to make it clear that I do not believe that this has, in any way, been down to the councillors either past or present. Likewise, there is no suggestion of any financial impropriety, as is borne out by the recent internal audit.

In my opinion, the council needs to scrutinise all areas of the council and to rebuild the structure, processes and files so that business can be transacted effectively. To do this requires significantly more resource to implement what is required and to continue the day to day business and the need to continually respond to the correspondence.

Based on the workload that I have seen, I believe that it is necessary to install at least 2 full time experienced clerks/RFO on a temporary basis for 2 -3 months to rebuild the councils core. In order to then maintain this and to continue to respond to these constant correspondents a full-time Clerk/RFO would be required.

However, that is not a feasible solution financially as to include a full time clerk in the budget, as well as the other costs that Walberswick is incurring, could mean a 3 fold increase in the precept.

I would therefore recommend that the council takes stock of this, before setting a forecast budget for the remainder of the year and also for the following year.