

# March 27, 2013

## MINUTES OF MEETING

Title:	<b>Basingstoke District Association of Parish and Town Councils</b>	
Held On:	Wednesday 27 <sup>th</sup> March 2013	
Present:	Alan Cox Martin Slatford Chris Holland Les Fryer Julian Jones David Richards Chris Pottinger Rodney Scott Keith Nuttall Peter Bloyce Brian Langer Roger Gardiner Colin Statham Sandy Johnston Steve Spillane Vanessa Richards Jo Slimin Sarah Curtis	Ashmansworth Baughurst (Chair) Bramley Chineham Dummer Ellisfield Hannington Oakley & Deane Old Basing & Lychpit Old Basing & Lychpit Overton Pamber Rooksdown Sherfield on Loddon Silchester Silchester Tadley Wootton St Lawrence
Guests:	Paul Bonner Melanie O'Sullivan Alison Edwards	BDBC BDBC Secretary
Apologies:	Cllr Elaine Still Laura Taylor John Jervoise Lorna Cuthill Penny Mayo Mike Kean	BDBC BDBC Herriard Mapledurwell & Up Nately Sherborne St John Whitchurch

### **1 Minutes of the last meeting – 27th September 2012**

1.1 The minutes were approved as an accurate record.

### **2 Apologies for absence**

2.1 Noted as above. Additional apologies for the 27th September 2012 which were not noted at that meeting were given for: Fraser Brown and John Robertson (Mortimer West End); Keith Nuttall (Old Basing); and Jacqueline Matthews (Ellisfield).

### 3 Changes to the Council Tax Regime

3.1 Paul Bonner (BDBC) gave a presentation on the localisation of council tax support and the impact of this on the tax base for parish councils. In summary, the localisation of council tax support was confirmed by the Local Government Finance Act 2012 and billing authorities were required to design and implement a local scheme for April 2013 onwards. BDBC's Council Tax Support Scheme for 2013/14 was agreed at a full council meeting in December 2012. Council tax support is granted as an additional reduction (discount) in the council tax system (estimated at £8.1m for 2013/14) which reduces the overall council tax base. Billing authorities and major preceptors receive grant funding to help offset the reduced council tax income, and BDBC has allocated Council Tax Support (CTS) grant funding to parishes in 2013/14 of approximately £53,500. This is to help offset the effects of a lower tax base for parishes (as a lower tax base means that, if parishes kept their precept the same for 2013/14 as 2012/13, band D council tax would be higher). The CTS grant is paid in addition to the precept request. Excessiveness principles did not apply to parishes for 2013/14 but could apply in future years.

3.2 The Council Tax Support Scheme for 2014/15 is to be subject to a further consultation exercise during summer 2013 and is expected to be decided at a full council meeting in December 2013. The impact on the tax base for the borough and parishes will not be known until after that meeting. The timetable for setting the tax base and receiving precepts is expected to be similar to that for 2013/14 (i.e. tax base finalised around late December/early January and precept requests to be provided by around mid-January).

3.3 A key concern raised at the meeting was that the timetable proposed would not allow councils sufficient time to consider the information provided by BDBC as part of budget and precept deliberations and get back to BDBC with precept requests by the deadline.  
**Action: Paul Bonner to report concerns back to BDBC.**

3.4 It was suggested that councillors need training and education around both managing a budget, particularly when there are unknown factors affecting the budget, and explaining budget and precept decisions to the public. It was noted that even precept increases which sound large in percentage terms are generally small increases in monetary terms for each household.

3.5 Jo Slimin (Tadley) said that Eric Pickles (Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government) had said at the NALC (National Association of Local Councils) conference that the grants to parish and town councils in 2013/14 to help them manage the localisation of council tax support was a one-off. Paul Bonner believed that the grant would be available in some form in 2014/15.

3.6 Martin Slatford pointed out that parish and town councils all currently receive £1,100 a year from BDBC. This is not guaranteed each year and councils need to know in advance of setting their budget and precept whether this will be received. Paul Bonner advised that councils are usually notified about this grant around November.

3.6 Brian Langer (Overton) said that councils need to be more flexible than they have been in the past. Instead of only having meetings at the same time they have always had them because "that is when they have always been", they need to accept that extra meetings might need to be scheduled to discuss the precept and budget in line with BDBC's timetable. He also suggested that BDBC need to be more flexible to ensure that officers are available to answer questions from councils regarding the tax base and budget/precept setting, which often falls around the Christmas period when the offices

are shut.

#### **4 Code of Conduct**

4.1 Melanie O’Sullivan, Deputy Monitoring Officer at BDBC, gave a presentation on the Code of Conduct which all councils must adopt. To summarise, each parish council has to adopt a Code of Conduct. As a minimum a Code must include: Registration of Interests; Disclosable Pecuniary Interests; and Nolan Principles. A council must be able to say which Code they have adopted and the date it was adopted. A councillor must declare his or her Disclosable Pecuniary Interests within 28 days of taking office or within 28 days of having that interest. BDBC then publishes those interests on its website and holds them in a public folder. Failure to declare a Disclosable Pecuniary Interest is a criminal offence. The Nolan Principles come into effect when a councillor has a personal interest which is not a Disclosable Pecuniary Interest, for example if a family member is involved in a matter to be discussed by the council, the councillor should declare the interest and, if it is believed there could be bias, should not be involved in the decision. Advice on declaration of interests can be sought from the clerk or Monitoring Officer.

4.2 The current Code of Conduct, which was adopted by BDBC on 17 May 2012, is currently under review. This is as agreed when the Code was adopted. It is hoped that new arrangements will result in resolving complaints quicker with an emphasis on informal settlements and will deal with personal interests that are not disclosable to make it clearer to councillors what they should do. References to dispensations, gifts and hospitality have also been included in the revised Code.

4.3 HALC is also producing a Code of Conduct which seems to be very similar to BDBC’s Code. Councils can choose which one they wish to adopt, as long as they are clear if asking the Monitoring Officer for advice which Code they have adopted.

4.2 Julian Jones (Dummer) asked whether the legal opinion on the Ernst & Young report had been resolved and was informed that supplementary legal advice is due on 8<sup>th</sup> April 2013.

4.3 Martin Slatford noted how lucky Basingstoke District was that BDBC ensured that a Code of Conduct was available for parish and town councils to adopt by the required deadline. It was clarified that only Disclosable Pecuniary interests, not Disclosable Personal Interests, are subject to criminal proceedings.

4.4 The point was made that inland revenue rules are strict when it comes to gifts and hospitality, and those over a certain value must be declared and have income tax paid on them.

4.5 Alan Cox (Ashmansworth) asked whether a councillor living next door to a contentious planning application ought to declare an interest. Melanie advised that it was a disclosable interest and she would advise the councillor not to vote on the application. With regards to planning applications and proximity to personal dwellings more broadly, it was important for councillors to always approach each application with an open mind.

4.6 **Action: Martin Slatford agreed to circulate the BDBC presentations as soon as he receives electronic copies.**

#### **5 Matters arising from the minutes of 27<sup>th</sup> September 2012**

Migration of websites

5.1 Martin thanked Alan Cox for his help with the BDAPTC website which has now been moved away from BDBC. BDAPTC are in the process of trying to move their email system away from BDBC and once they have completed we will receive the £375 grant from BDBC. Enough parish councils used Vision ICT for their websites to enable BDAPTC to get the work done on their website by Vision ICT for free. Martin Slatford informed the meeting that he understood that BDBC were short staffed in trying to move email accounts to other systems and people were therefore experiencing problems with email systems that were still hosted by BDBC.

## **6 Mayor's Reception and Parish Conference**

6.1 A satisfaction survey for the Mayor's Reception and Parish Conference held on 28<sup>th</sup> January 2013 was circulated. Attendance to the conference was lower than usual which was possibly largely due to a last minute change of date. Several councillors reported that they had found the neighbourhood planning presentation at the event very useful. Ideas for making the event more popular were to: move it back to its previous November date; have more than one a year; allow others, Some respondents thought that only Chairs and Vice Chairs were invited, the event is open to all Councillors , but limited to 2 from each Council ( more can attend if they ask and space is available ) . Clarity of the event is important, ensure that it retains the two-part name of "Mayor's Reception and Parish Conference" and make the link to the BDAPTC and its meetings clearer.

**Action: invites for next Mayor's Reception and Parish Conference to be sent by both the Mayor's Office and BDAPTC.**

## **7 Planning**

7.1 A letter from a parish council regarding a planning application holds the same weight as a letter from a member of the public. There is therefore merit in councils encouraging Councillors and residents to write to BDBC over contentious applications.

Training for Parish and Town Councillors in planning

**Action. BDBC to be asked to consider referring applications to the Planning Committee if Parish or Town Councils send objections.**

7.2 BDBC need to be efficient in the allocation of officer time to working with Parish and Town Councils. Several officers regularly make presentations to clerks at Parish Liaison Meetings. These meetings are held during the day and several Councils are unable to attend as their Clerks have day jobs. On average 6 Councils are represented at Parish Liaison Meetings. The minutes are then circulated to all clerks. Many representatives at this meeting were not aware of the content of officers' briefings at the Parish Liaison meetings. The meeting believed that presentations at the Parish Liaison meetings should be made to the BDAPTC meetings also. Perhaps officers could present to a joint meeting and then the BDAPTC and Parish Liaison meetings could split into different rooms at the Civic Offices. Les Fryer (Chineham) said that the usefulness of Parish Liaison meetings depended very much on the parish clerk, whether the clerk was able to attend such meetings and the importance they associated with forwarding the information to councillors.

**Action. BDBC to be asked to consider making presentations to joint meetings of**

**BDAPTC and Parish Liaison meeting. Each group to have separate meetings before or after the presentations**

7.3 It was noted that the new Local Plan for the Basingstoke area which was due to start in 2012 is yet to come into force, and the National Planning Framework from March 2012 has still not been fully adopted. It is therefore difficult for parish and town councils to work on planning matters in the absence of a clear higher tier planning framework.

7.4 The general consensus was that the Neighbourhood Plans presentation at the Mayor's Reception was inspiring, but that such plans would generally require an investment of around £20,000 and require approximately three years to develop. These costs would be outside most Councils budgets. Precepts could not be increased to cover and so external funding would be needed. Councillors were also reminded that Neighbourhood Plans had to comply with housing figures set by BDBC and could not be used to countermand a higher plan. However, they were a useful tool to influence where dwellings were located and how the associated infrastructure could be developed. Julian Jones (Dummer) said that Dummer had used its Village Design Statement to add weight to its planning arguments in the past and councillors have been told that they can use the VDS as a starting point for a Neighbourhood Plan.

7.5 It was suggested that a report could be circulated regularly by BDBC highlighting what is going on in planning that councillors should be aware of. This report should be circulated to both clerks and by BDAPTC direct to its members.

7.6 It was noted that BDBC have not held training sessions for councillors on planning for a couple of years. HALC do provide such training quite frequently for a reasonably small fee, and if enough people are going to attend they will provide training in a requested locality. **Action: Can BDBC provide more training sessions for Councillors on planning**

**Action: Planning to be on the agenda for the meeting on 20th June 2013 and to request a representative from BDBC to attend for this item.**

## **8. Community Speedwatch**

8.1 Baughurst, Silchester, Bramley, Old Basing, Chineham and Oakley all have Community Speedwatch schemes.

8.2 Keith Nuttall (Old Basing) reported that a shortage of police officers was delaying their scheme and they were awaiting training for their coordinators to input data onto the police computer. Without this training they were not allowed to get out with the equipment and could not get the scheme up and running. Baughurst reported that their PCSOs were inputting their data onto the police computer.

8.3 Rodney Scott reported that Oakley's scheme is up and running and volunteers are inputting data onto the police computers. He reported that they have the cooperation of an excellent local PC. **Action: Rodney Scott to give Martin Slatford details of Oakley's speedwatch coordinator so Martin can put him/her in touch with other speedwatch coordinators in the district.**

8.4 Chris Holland reported that Bramley speedwatch team have been out three times and their PCSO, James Rickerby, has been excellent. The effectiveness of the PCSOs in each area is key. Currently the rules of the scheme are being interpreted differently from area to area by different PCSOs and this is a problem.

8.5 It was confirmed that approved speedwatch volunteers are treated as members of the extended police family for insurance purposes.

8.3 Martin Slatford reported that he had contacted the Police and Crime Commissioner for Hampshire about speedwatch and had been passed on to Superintendent Chris Brown, Head of Roads policing, who referred to us to Sergeant Rick Grant. **Action: Martin will contact Sergeant Rick Grant and pass on the issues specific to Chineham and Old Basing to open up a dialogue between those parishes and Sergeant Rick Grant.**

## **9. Reports**

### Hampshire Association of Local Councils (HALC)

9.1 At the last meeting of the National Association of Local Councils (NALC) the Chief Executive gave a summary of the projects listed for the next year. The NALC Chief Executive will be leaving in May 2014. The Chairman of NALC, who is from a smaller council, has said he will make sure that NALC assists smaller parishes achieve their objectives. HALC are reprinting the new Councillors handbook as NALC are being slow to do so.

### Voluntary Services Forum

9.2 The Local Strategic Partnership (LSP) Conference discussed the new benefits regime. Concerns were raised about the requirement for people to register online and the impact on people in rural areas without access to computers and poor transport links.

9.3 The Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) recently ran an event in conjunction with the Landowner's Association on broadband. Landowners are encouraged to diversify and rent old agricultural buildings for other business uses, but people are put off from renting such buildings if the broadband speeds are poor.

### Community Safety Forum

9.4 Sandy Johnston has been invited to an event on 4<sup>th</sup> April organised by Hampshire Constabulary designed to get a collective understanding of how organised crime has an impact locally and how we can tackle it together.

### Disability Awareness Day

9.5 A seminar was held at the Discovery Centre about the changes to disability benefits from April 2013. Another seminar is scheduled for May and Sandy Johnston will report back to the BDAPTC about this at the meeting on 20<sup>th</sup> June.

## **10. Date of next meeting – Annual General Meeting on 20<sup>th</sup> June 2013**

10.1 Keith Nuttall is organising a speaker from South Central Ambulance NHS FT to give two presentations: one on Foundation Trust Status and one on Community Responders.

10.2 Martin Slatford is not putting himself forward for Chair at the next AGM.

**Meeting closed at 10pm.**