OALC Newsletter

june 2020

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**Training Programme 2020** <https://www.oalc.org.uk/events>

All our training sessions for the rest of the year will now be delivered on line.

If you had booked a place(s) for the face to face training we will contact you to find out whether you wish to convert to the online course or have a refund

Chairmanship skills 15th July is fully booked

**Vacancies**

North Hinksey PC – Clerk/RFO

## latest corona virus advice

**PLEASE read this section and check the latest** [**central government guidance**](https://www.gov.uk/coronavirus) **as it is constantly evolving**

1. NALC and SLCC have produced a joint view on council meetings, following eased lock down restrictions from 4th July which was sent out to councils on Saturday 27th June.  The statement is:

*“Following the Government announcement of further easing of lockdown restrictions from 4th July, NALC and SLCC* ***strongly*** *advise local councils to continue to meet remotely, without the need for face to face contact. Government rules still state that we should all work from home if we can. Local councils have the* [*powers*](http://www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2020/392/pdfs/uksi_20200392_en.pdf) *to hold public meetings remotely by using video or telephone conferencing technology until May 2021 and so most councils will have no need to meet in person. Furthermore, local councils have the duty to allow the public to observe council meetings without placing restrictions on the number attending, which many council meeting venues will not be able to accommodate in a safe way at this time.*

*However, where a local council does have an identified need to hold a physical meeting, and if they are unable to conduct council business in any other way, they can consider doing so from 4th July. These meetings* ***must*** *be managed within the social distancing and* [*‘safer workplaces’ guidance*](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/working-safely-during-coronavirus-covid-19?utm_campaign=business_support_covid_2020&amp;utm_medium=social%20&amp;utm_source=stakeholder&amp;utm_content=safer-working-stakeholder-1105) *produced by Government, which includes the requirement to conduct a risk assessment to determine if it is feasible and safe to hold a physical meeting. It is important that this risk assessment is carried out, and any identified actions to reduce risk to attendees are implemented before any face to face meetings resume. Councils must keep documentation of this risk assessment and the reasons why the council has taken the decision to return to face to face meetings.*

*NALC will be updating its guidance on remote meetings early next week to include information on how to approach ‘hybrid meetings’ (where some people attend in person and others join remotely) effectively and safely.*

*Further information can be found on NALC’s* [*dedicated Coronavirus webpage*](https://www.nalc.gov.uk/coronavirus) *including links to Government workplace guidance and a guide to risk assessment.”*

**Please note OALC and NALC are still strongly discouraging physical face to face meetings.**

Local councils **must** follow the [Government’s ‘safer workplaces’ guidance](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/working-safely-during-coronavirus-covid-19/shops-and-branches) before deciding to return to in-person meetings. This includes conducting a risk assessment and considering what precautions can be taken to manage and mitigate risks. OALC sent out the BHIB Risk Assessment guide earlier this month (attached) to assist you in doing your risk assessments. The council should at least consider:

* Providing hand sanitiser to those entering the meeting room
* Staggering arrival times for staff, councillors and members of the public
* Ensuring (public and Councillor) seating is placed at least 2m apart
* Asking people to wear face masks
* Holding paperless meetings
* If papers are provided, people should be discouraged from sharing with others to minimise how many people handle the papers
* Arranging seating so people are not facing each other directly
* Choosing a venue with good air flow, including opening windows and doors where possible

1. The Regulations on virtual meetings – [The Local Authorities and Police and Crime Panels (Coronavirus) (Flexibility of Local Authority and Police and Crime Panel Meetings) (England and Wales) Regulations 2020 (No.392)](http://www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2020/392/contents/made) came into force on 4th April 2020. All member councils have received NALC briefing L01-20 explaining what the Regulations mean in practical terms. The Regulations apply to town and parish council meetings until 7th May 2021.
2. Check your district council website and the County Council’s too <https://news.oxfordshire.gov.uk/coronavirus-information-from-the-government/>
3. **From 4th July the lockdown will be easing.** However, if you are confused about what you can and can’t do please go to this government website – it outlines the businesses/premises which can reopen including play areas, outdoor gyms, community centres, museums. However, they are still expected to follow covid-19 safety measures

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-outbreak-faqs-what-you-can-and-cant-do/coronavirus-outbreak-faqs-what-you-can-and-cant-do>

1. OALC sent out a briefing earlier this week on **reopening of playgrounds**. And your own district council may have sent you their briefing too. This is the briefing…

“*With the easing of the lockdown, the government has issued guidance on managing playgrounds and outdoor gyms post 4th July -* [*https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-guidance-for-managing-playgrounds-and-outdoor-gyms*](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-guidance-for-managing-playgrounds-and-outdoor-gyms)

*Unfortunately, the guidance doesn’t fully recognise the practical problems associated with managing facilities that you are not directly on hand to supervise. So whether you have one playground in the corner of the ‘rec’ and work 5 hours per week or have 50+ playgrounds and have a team to manage them this raises problems of balancing risk with the desire of children to play safely.*

*Some Clerks favour keeping playgrounds closed because they don’t believe they can sufficiently mitigate the perceived risks. Others believe it is impractical (and wrong) to keep children away from play equipment, particularly if it is unfenced. It is all to do with mitigating perceived risk.*

*A risk assessment must be carried out, use the link in the guidance which takes you to the HSE website and their five step risk assessment process:*

* [*Identify hazards*](https://www.hse.gov.uk/simple-health-safety/risk/steps-needed-to-manage-risk.htm#_Identify_hazards)
* [*Assess the risks*](https://www.hse.gov.uk/simple-health-safety/risk/steps-needed-to-manage-risk.htm#_Assess_the_risks)
* [*Control the risks*](https://www.hse.gov.uk/simple-health-safety/risk/steps-needed-to-manage-risk.htm#_Control_the_risks)
* [*Record your findings*](https://www.hse.gov.uk/simple-health-safety/risk/steps-needed-to-manage-risk.htm#_Record_your_findings)
* [*Review the controls*](https://www.hse.gov.uk/simple-health-safety/risk/steps-needed-to-manage-risk.htm#_Review)

*We sent out a risk assessment form with the email which could be adapted and used.*

***What can you practically do?***

* *Do a risk assessment. Talk to your insurance company for their views*
* *If the playground is fenced estimate the numbers that can use it safely with social distancing – put signage up reminding about social distancing and the advised number of people allowed at any one time*
* *Advise only one adult per child*
* *Where equipment has lots of seats or places children in close proximity, chain up one swing or tape up intermediate seats, so children are distanced from each other*
* *If it’s a busy playground put 2m queueing lines outside (if practical)*
* *Cleaning – this is probably the most difficult to manage. “Owners and operators are advised to manage any potential risk, cleaning high traffic touch points frequently.” The guidance suggests signage to encourage users to clean equipment themselves:*
  + *to promote cleaning of equipment by users, particularly where there are clear touch points such as swing rockers, see saws, machine handles or exercise bars*
  + *encouraging parents to bring and use hand sanitiser gel or wipes to clean their children’s hands*
  + *to encourage hand hygiene, particularly at the beginning and end of play*
  + *to advise users (or parents of users) not to touch their faces, and to cough or sneeze into a tissue or arm when a tissue is not available*
  + *to remind adults and children not to put their mouths on equipment or their hands in their mouths*
  + *to promote and remind users, parents, guardians and carers of the need for social distancing*
* *No food to be consumed in  the playground and all litter to be taken home*

*The guidance goes on to say - “Owners and operators may wish to consider reminding parents of the owner/operator’s legal obligations towards the playground users such as signs stating that allowing children to use playground equipment is done at their own risk where appropriate.”*

The governing bodies of all the major sports are offering their own covid 19 risk assessment advice which is constantly being updated, so always check you are using the latest version –

* Basketball - <https://www.basketballengland.co.uk/media/12222/return-to-play-guidance.pdf>
* Tennis <https://www.lta.org.uk/about-us/tennis-news/news-and-opinion/general-news/2020/march/coronavirus-covid-19-advice-for-venues/>
* Cricket <https://www.ecb.co.uk/news/1657168/cricket-and-covid-19-your-questions-answered>
* Skateboarding <https://www.skateboard-england.org/covid19-update>
* Outdoor gyms – general central government guidance <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-guidance-on-phased-return-of-sport-and-recreation/guidance-for-providers-of-outdoor-facilities-on-the-phased-return-of-sport-and-recreation>
* Football <https://www.fifa.com/who-we-are/news/fifa-who-and-football-stakeholders-draft-medical-considerations-and-risk-assessm>

1. **Risk assessment on reopening facilities.** All member councils received on 10th June, from OALC the BHIB/ NALC *Risk Assessment for Covid-19* which is in the Members Area of our website under NALC briefings. It’s a useful document covering:

* Government guidance
* What is a COVID-19 risk assessment?
* What standards should we use?
* Undertaking a COVID-19 risk assessment
* How to assess risk
* Measures to reduce and manage risk
* Record keeping
* Publicising council decisions
* Public information
* Staff and contractors

1. **Re-opening High Streets Safely fund**

OALC have been chasing around the County Council, as Highway Authority, trying to get a simple briefing on reopening High Streets, in particular addressing the pavement and highways implications. Our emails bounced around finally landing on Keith Stenning’s desk by which time High Streets had reopened and the moment had passed. A page was promised on the County Council website together with contact details of three growth managers each with their own geographical part of the county. I’m not sure whether any progress has been made, I’m not aware of it but the district councils seem to have helped their larger towns with one way pedestrian flows etc.

<https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/887244/Reopening_High_Streets_Safely_Fund_-_Guidance.pdf>

1. **Reopening your own offices** (if you have one!). Please follow the government guidance on safe working - <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/working-safely-during-coronavirus-covid-19/offices-and-contact-centres>
2. Village and community halls will be allowed to reopen from 04 July.  This is broadly covered by a government [Guidance Note on Opening Certain Businesses and Venues](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/opening-certain-businesses-and-venues-in-england-from-4-july-2020).  The range of activities allowed will be very limited.  As with playgrounds, reopening is not mandatory and facility owners must make decisions on a case by case basis.

More specific government guidance for community centres is anticipated in the near future.  In the meantime one of the best resources is the [website of Community First Oxfordshire](https://www.communityfirstoxon.org/centenary/community-halls-advice/), which has the latest ACRE information sheet and template risk assessments. Also see page 17.

## two Useful tips

1. **Cheques – it’s time to ditch them in favour of online banking**

The Covid-19 pandemic has illustrated how useful online banking can be. The long and tedious journey of a covid parish council cheque…



Cheque book lives with the Clerk, tucked safely away with other financial papers of the council… online Council meeting … resolved to pay the OALC subscription invoice (which was sent in February) … Clerk fills out the cheque … and drives to the first signatories house … rings door bell and hands cheque book over at a suitable distance …cheque signatory ensures the cheques are made out for the correct amount, to the correct people and signs …hands cheque book back…Clerk drives/walks to second signatory … repeats process … Clerk puts cheques and explanatory note in envelope, addresses and stamps it … takes to post box… (can get lost in the post, in which case go back to the beginning) … arrives later at OALC office …we visit the office once per week at the moment to collect post… once we have a pile of cheques, we check the details are correct, (every year a couple need to be returned)… we try to find a bank that is open (not easy, only main ones are open) … pay cheques in.

How much easier it would be for everyone if this process was done online. The Model Financial Regulations have allowed for online banking for some years now. A substantial proportion of Oxfordshire councils do their banking online and we would encourage all councils to make the move. We know that the main banks don’t make life easy, we all have horror stories of trying to negotiate the minefield of changing bank signatories etc. But the end result is definitely worth the grief.

1. **Annual Meeting of the Council.**

Most of you probably won’t have had the Annual Meeting of the Council which is fine the [Regulations](http://www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2020/392/contents) allow this. But what about all the things (apart from electing the Chairman) which usually happen at that meeting. Reconfirming Standing Orders, Committee membership, appointments to outside bodies, reviewing Registers of Interest etc. Your Internal Auditor next year may ask when these were reviewed. Make a mental note to include them on the council agenda so they don’t get forgotten.

## OALC news

1. **Subscription invoices**

Thank you to the vast majority of councils that have paid their subscription invoices which were sent out in late February. For those that haven’t paid July is the end of the grace period. If we haven’t received your cheques by the end of the month access to all (very useful) OALC services will cease.

1. **The OALC AGM scheduled for 6th July has been cancelled**. All member councils should have received the Annual Report and Accounts which were sent out in early June.

## Oxfordshire County Council



1. Refer to the County Council website for their latest information – updated on a daily basis and their specific Covid-19 webpage <https://www.oxfordshire.gov.uk/council/coronavirus-covid-19> . It covers waste recycling centres, schools and information on all the services the County Council delivers: https://news.oxfordshire.gov.uk/coronavirus-information-from-the-government/

2**. £2.9m to be invested in Fast Track Plans to help safe travel across Oxfordshire**

Cyclists and pedestrians will hopefully start to notice the benefit of plans to spend £600,000 to help them to travel safely while social distancing as Oxfordshire gradually emerges from lockdown. These [fast-track plans](https://news.oxfordshire.gov.uk/oxfordshire-to-invest-29m--in-urgent-travel-recovery-plans/) are the first part of a wider £2.9 million of Government funding to improve cycling infrastructure, parts of the roadwork network, and footpaths across Oxfordshire as the nation responds to the COVID-19 pandemic.

The county council will be working with the city and district councils to -   
• Carry out enhanced maintenance for paths and cycle routes  
• Install new cycle parking facilities across all districts and Oxford  
• Change signal timings to prioritise pedestrians and cyclists  
• Restrict hours of loading/servicing in key city centre streets  
• Upgrade Park & Rides, with more room to park bikes  
• Free up routes for pedestrians only  
• Improve signage

1. Nick Blacow, Highways Records Manager at Oxfordshire County Council has written about an issue that is becoming increasingly common nationally as well as within Oxfordshire:

*“It concerns the* ***selling off by public auction of small areas of open land*** *on some older housing estates. I run the Highway Records Team for Oxfordshire County Council and I am writing to hopefully allay some of the worries that your members may have and also ask for their help.*

*The Highway Records Team are responsible for maintaining the record of what is public highway in Oxfordshire. We have a legal duty to maintain what is called the List of Streets of Highway Maintainable at Public Expense. This we do by indicating highway status on a series of Ordnance Survey maps.*

*When a housing estate is built, the roads, verges and occasionally some areas of green open space become public highway, this is a legal process called a Highway Adoption. When this happens the ownership of the area remains with the developer but, because it is adopted highway, they no longer control it and responsibility for its maintenance falls to the Highway Authority in this case Oxfordshire County Council. Its status as Highway takes legal precedence over any ownership, in law this means the owner of the land has no control over it.*

*Increasingly on older developments, often because the original developer has now either gone into liquidation or been taken over, these areas of land are finding their way into online auctions. Sometimes they are listed as potential development sites or with the suggestion that they can be divided up and sold to homeowners to extend their gardens. The information provided by the auction companies often doesn’t make it clear that the land is adopted as Public Highway. This can cause concern with local residents and understandably so.*

*While we try and keep an eye open for as many of these auctions as possible, we often find out about them too late to take action before the sale proceeds. I should also point out that there are legal processes that can be undertaken to remove the highway status to enable development, so just because its highway it doesn’t mean it can never be developed. These processes can however sometimes be quite lengthy and complex and parish councils are principal consultees in a similar manner to the planning process. My team can explain what these are if necessary.*

***As I said at the start, I am writing to ask for help. If any Parish Council or resident becomes aware of one of these auctions that affect land in their locality, it would be really helpful if they get in touch with us to pass the details on, ideally this will be via email at*** [***highway.records@oxfordshire.gov.uk***](mailto:highway.records@oxfordshire.gov.uk) ***We will be able to let them know if the land is Public Highway and contact the auctioneers to advise them to make this clear in their information, if they haven’t already done so. We can’t stop the auction proceeding but, if people are aware of the facts it may go some way to easing local worries or allowing informed purchase decisions*.”**

This is a newspaper article of a recent instance of a land auction in Grove where an area of land central to an estate was auctioned off <https://www.heraldseries.co.uk/news/18477052.grove-residents-fight-save-land-edington-place-dom-hill-bench/>

1. **Volunteers Supporting Highways - Fix My Street Super Users**  
   Following a successful pilot, the Fix My Street Super User volunteer scheme is ready to roll out across the county. The idea is that a member of the community volunteers to be a Super User and receives training from Oxfordshire County Council Highways & Volunteer Coordination teams.

The Super User is then able to monitor the pavements and 30mph or less unclassified roads, and directly order repair works to potholes that meet the specific criteria. The aim is to make repairs more efficient; saving time, money and making things safe.  
For more information email: [volunteercoordinationteam@oxfordshire.gov.uk](mailto:volunteercoordinationteam@oxfordshire.gov.uk)

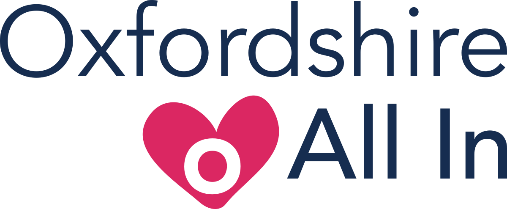
1. **Oxfordshire Together**  
   A new document highlighting Super Users and other volunteering activities for Parish & Town Councils to consider is now available online. It includes a set of How-To-Guides on initiatives such as sign cleaning and vegetation clearance, as well as being a Fix My Street Super User.  
   Visit: <https://www.oxfordshire.gov.uk/sites/default/files/file/about-council/OxfordshireTogether.pdf>
2. **Public Rights of Way**  
   A new ‘how to’ guide has been produced to help communities improve access to their local footpaths & bridleways by providing information about common path scenarios.  
   Visit: <https://www.oxfordshire.gov.uk/residents/environment-and-planning/countryside/countryside-access/improving-countryside-access-oxfordshire/communities-and-paths>
3. Oxfordshire County Council will be gradually reopening its libraries and registration offices during coming weeks and months. The county council is planning a phased approach to the reopening of public buildings, with every precaution being taken to make sure this happens safely.

# Local News

## Councillor covid grant scheme – SODC and vale

Each South and Vale District Councillor has up to £2,000 to make discretionary grant payments to community groups and other appropriate organisations that are directly responding to the Coronavirus pandemic in their ward. Please contact your district councillor directly or email grants@southandvale.gov.uk

## Oxfordshire All in

Oxfordshire All In started as a tool for groups and organisations in the county to help coordinate community responses to Covid-19. But it seems to have developed and blossomed into a new and radical group on the community and voluntary scene in Oxfordshire. The stated purpose of their work is to be an effective infrastructure for community support and action - working with and on behalf of people, local communities, established voluntary organisations, and the public sector effectively as possible.

Oxfordshire All In <https://www.oxfordshireallin.org/> offers tools and resources to you and your parish council including:

* a Response Map – there are now 400+ support groups mapped across the county <https://www.oxfordshireallin.org/local-support-groups>
* FAQ’s covering DBS, Volunteer Safety, GDPR and Safeguarding
* Resources by Individuals, by groups, by areas <https://www.oxfordshireallin.org/resources>

## Good Neighbour Information sent to you on 30th june

With the gradual easing of lockdown, some form of normality is beginning to return, with many people starting back at work and household compositions changing. While these are positive changes, they also have the potential to leave a number of vulnerable people in the district with reduced social support, and they may be finding it more difficult to access essentials or medicines.

There are established Good Neighbour schemes across the county, and in others, new neighbourhood support groups have been formed in response to the crisis.  These groups have been supported in their excellent work by [Oxfordshire All In](https://www.oxfordshireallin.org/), (see above) and the need for them clearly remains.

 Your clerk was sent ‘Good *neighbour, safe neighbour’* campaign materials which have been developed by Oxfordshire’s county and district councils and follow Government guidance. Each is tweaked to be relevant to your area. The aim is to provide advice on how individual residents can check in on their neighbours safely and how to contact the council if they are concerned.

Please share the leaflet and display the poster as widely as possible.

## Free trees for parishes

Applications are invited from parish councils and community groups that want to undertake well-planned tree and hedge planting projects which actively involve young people aged up to 21.



The Tree Council will fund 100% of the cost (excluding VAT) of strong applications from £300 to an upper limit of £1,500. Projects have to take place this winter (November 2020 - March 2021), preferably during National Tree Week (28 November - 6 December 2020).

If funded projects cannot go ahead at any time this winter due to social distancing restrictions related to the coronavirus/COVID-19 pandemic, then the delivery deadline of the grant will be extended to the following year <https://treecouncil.org.uk/apply-for-one-of-our-tree-planting-grants/>

## grants available to support projects that unite communities



The Janet & Bryan Moore Charitable Trust has been established to support projects which unite local communities within the counties of Warwickshire, Oxfordshire and Northamptonshire.

**The Trust is very keen to receive applications. The maximum grant is £20,000.**

All grants award by the Trust must be used to cover costs that are directly connected to carrying out the charitable activities that the Trustees have agreed to fund (**Funded Activities**).    
  
Grants can be used either to cover costs that are directly connected to carrying out the charitable activities that the Trustees have agreed to fund or to fund expenditure on the following:  
(a) Salary costs;  
(b) Capital expenditure, provided the Applicant is able to demonstrate that the expenditure is essential to the charitable activities that the Trustees have agreed to fund and that any assets acquired using grant money will be used for similar purposes after then end of the proposed activities;  
(c) Contributions to the cost of overheads, provided that the Applicant is able to demonstrate that such overhead costs are essential for, and directly linked to, the charitable activities that the Trustees have agreed to fund; and  
(d) Other types of expenditure.  
  
If the Applicant is a non-charitable organisation the proposal must also:   
(a) provide evidence that the organisation has a bank account with at least two unrelated signatories; and   
(b) demonstrate that all of the activities in the proposal will qualify as being charitable for the public benefit if they are undertaken by an organisation that is registered as a Trust in England and Wales.

More information and an application form on their website <https://www.janetandbryanmooretrust.org.uk/>

## Oxfordshire’s Nature Recovery Network will need a doubling of land managed for wildlife by 2050

Nature continues to face an uncertain future, with many birds, butterflies, flowers and other wildlife disappearing from Oxfordshire’s countryside at an alarming rate. But nature can bounce back given a chance. And to give wildlife that opportunity, experts from around the county are developing a Nature Recovery Strategy for Oxfordshire.

Wild Oxfordshire has published the first draft of a Nature Recovery Network Map, identifying places where wildlife can be helped to return. This work feeds very neatly into the Oxfordshire 2050 Open Thought communication channel

Contacts: Mike Pollard, Wild Oxfordshire [mike@wildoxfordshire.org.uk](mailto:mike@wildoxfordshire.org.uk) Tel. 07981 048928

<https://www.wildoxfordshire.org.uk/biodiversity/oxfordshires-nature-recovery-network/>

## ONPA summary of the June 2nd Growth Board Meeting

At its meeting on June 2nd the Oxfordshire Growth Board received updates on the initial impact of COVID19 on its work.

  
 Here are a few of the report highlights which may affect Neighbourhood Development Plan’s:

* An estimated 75% of housing construction sites in the County stopped all work in March. Many re-opened in May, but with significant restrictions on working practices, supply chains, materials availability, etc.
* Housing market activity may dip by 50% in this financial year, and house prices may fall by 10%.
* Government advice to councils has suggested that they should relax fulfilment of S.106 requirements to help developers. This would have a major effect on delivery of affordable housing (49% of such housing was delivered through S.106 agreements in 2018/19).
* Shared ownership schemes and access to mortgages will also be hit by changes in employment status, particularly for lower-paid people.
* The Local Investment Strategy highlights the importance of Oxfordshire as “the UK’s Innovation Engine”, with a strong emphasis on the county’s role in the proposed Oxford-Cambridge Arc.
* An Oxfordshire Economic Recovery Plan is being set up.

The Board is seeking agreement from the Ministry for a minimum 7-month delay to the programme for the Oxfordshire 2050 Plan – as follows:

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Oxfordshire Plan Stage** | **Growth Board**  **2019 Milestones** | **Proposed revised Milestones** |
| **Further engagement (Oxfordshire Open Thought)** | Nov/Dec 19 | May 20 & Sept 20 |
| **Consultation on spatial options (scale and broad locations) (Reg.18 part 2)** | June/July 20 | Jan 21 |
| **Consultation on Draft Plan (Reg. 19)** | Nov/Dec 20 | Sept 21 |
| **Submission** | March 21 | Jan 22 |
| **Examination** | June-Sept 21 | Apr 22 |
| **Inspector’s Report** | December 21 | July 22 |
| **Adoption** | March 22 | Oct 22 |

If your council has a ‘made’ Neighbourhood Plan then membership of ONPA could provide collective strength to ensure the policies are respected and taken into consideration by your local planning authority. More information here - <https://onpa.uk/membership>

## Cherwell DC Councillor Covid Fund

42 grants have been awarded, to projects all over Cherwell District aimed at addressing and recovering from the Covid crisis.  The total amount of grant funding awarded to date from the [Councillor Covid-19 Priority Fund](https://www.cherwell.gov.uk/info/118/communities/683/covid-19-councillor-priority-fund) is £30,649.74

 The application form and guidance on how to apply for the [Councillor COVID-19 Priority Fund](https://www.cherwell.gov.uk/info/118/communities/683/covid-19-councillor-priority-fund) is on [cherwell.gov.uk](https://www.cherwell.gov.uk/info/118/communities/683/covid-19-councillor-priority-fund). All applications should be sent electronically to [grants@cherwell-dc.gov.uk](mailto:grants@cherwell-dc.gov.uk) Our team remain ready to process applications as soon as they come in.

## Corona virus honours

If someone in your community has done selfless and outstanding work in response to the Corona Virus pandemic you may want to nominate them for an honour. More information and a nomination form is here -

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-honours-nomination-form>

## Oxfordshire County Council - Gypsy and Traveller Service

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
|  | **Pete Gammond**  Service Manager  07867 538 029  [Peter.gammond@oxfordshire.gov.uk](mailto:Peter.gammond@oxfordshire.gov.uk) |
|  | **Ewa Fras**  Traveller Site Officer  07554 115 677  [Ewa.fras@oxfordshire.gov.uk](mailto:Ewa.fras@oxfordshire.gov.uk) |
| [Andy Rymer's Profile Photo](https://www.facebook.com/profile/picture/view/?profile_id=1206921563) | **Andy Rymer**  Traveller Support Officer  07551 680 637  [Andy.Rymer@Oxfordshire.gov.uk](mailto:Andy.Rymer@Oxfordshire.gov.uk)  Working days - Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday. |

Our office number 01865 815569.

Our office email: [Travellers@oxfordshire.gov.uk](mailto:Travellers@oxfordshire.gov.uk)

Postal address: Oxfordshire Gypsy and Traveller Services, 1st Floor, Bicester Fire Station, Queens Avenue, Bicester. OXON. OX26 2NR.

If you have any concerns about Travellers in your parish or vicinity contact Pete Gammond, or one of the team - they are the experts, they will respond very quickly. They keep Clerks informed about what is going on throughout the county with a weekly update like this below. If you aren’t receiving it please contact them to be put on their distribution list.

|  |
| --- |
| **Unauthorised Encampments for Week Ending**  **Friday 26th June 2020**  **Unauthorised Encampment**  **Cherwell**  Appletree Lane, Nr Cropredy, 3 caravans our regulars no issues they are leaving today, no complaints received.  **Oxford City**  Nothing to report  **South and Vale**  Nothing to report  **WODC**  The wood carver in the bow top caravan with 2 horses in Deer Park Road, Witney. We did have had more complaint’s this week about the noise late at night, we have visited him, has been advised re the noise and the time of day to do his chain sawing, he will be moving shortly, but not far I’m afraid.  We have had no further complaints.  **Other Matters**  **Land on the Over Norton Road, Chipping Norton**  A parcel of land was recently sold at auction, it has been purchased by a member of the Traveller community, there was a sign outside recently, now taken down that stated “Residential Gypsy Site For Sale Subject To Planning” also gave a phone number. WODC planning have been involved for some weeks now and are making visits to the location, at this stage no planning application has been submitted.  There is a large amount of community interest in this matter and we are working in partnership with WODC Planning, Chipping Norton Town Council, Over Norton Parish Council to provide united response.  We have visited, taken photographs and updated WODC Planning.  The local MP has taken an interest following enquires to him.  **Planning Applications**   * P20/S0595/FUL Land to the East side of Junction 8a, M40, Waterstock, Oxfordshire, for 3 mobile homes. Registered on the 12th March 2020. * P20/S0595/FUL Land north of Chapel Lane, Roke, OX10 6JE for 1 plot. Registered on 27th August 2019 * [20/00828/ADJ](https://planningregister.cherwell.gov.uk/Planning/Display/20/00828/ADJ)Plot 19 - Oaksview Park, Arncott Road, Boarstall, Buckingham, though just outside Cherwell the impact is on Arncott. Registered on 19th March 2020. |

## Swyncombe PC would like your assistance…

The Chairman, Liz Longley writes –

*'We are a small parish near Watlington.  We had an incident with Travellers recently.  We have been investigating ways of preventing this from happening in the future.  We would welcome any constructive suggestions.*

*Thank you in advance.*

*Liz Longley - Chairman - Swyncombe Parish Council****please email*** *:* [*lizlongley1@gmail.com*](mailto:lizlongley1@gmail.com)*'*

## Thames water writes…

 As a provider of life essential supplies, Thames Water work hard to ensure water never stops flowing but from time to time, things can go wrong. In these events, we try to deliver bottled water to people with water-dependent medical conditions (i.e. at-home dialysis) and to those with mobility issues, first of all.

As key workers, we support the NHS, the councils, our carers and charities in order meet the needs of our customers in vulnerable circumstances. You can benefit from our free priority services: get in touch by emailing [Tania.christie@thameswater.co.uk](mailto:Tania.christie@thameswater.co.uk) (or ask a friend to email for you and we can call you back) - we would like you to know that we can add that extra layer of support to help increase your feeling of wellbeing and independence at home knowing that we are here for you when you need us. If you have online access, you can find more about becoming a priority customer and register at thameswater.co.uk/extrasupport. If you have no internet access, we can register you over the phone (0800 009 3652 option 3) or send you a paper application form in the post with a free return envelope.

If you need help with paying your water bills, find out more at <https://www.thameswater.co.uk/my-account/billing-and-payment/help-paying-your-bill>

And last but not least, we developed some fun water testing games to pass the time: <https://youtu.be/oJ5DIE-3SKI> I hope you enjoy them.

## Oxfordshire 2050 writes…

Welcome to Oxfordshire Open Thought

As part of the Oxfordshire Plan 2050, we are looking for solutions to three big challenges facing us as we plan for the future: how we will all live and work, how we will move around, and how we will tackle climate change.

We know the coronavirus outbreak has challenged society, forcing everyone to change and adapt how they work and live.

It is still unclear what this new “normal” will look like but some of the changes we’ve all made during lockdown life could create a better future for Oxfordshire.

More people are working from home, walking and cycling to get around and appreciating our public green spaces more than ever.

These changes, combined with the world-leading innovation ecosystem in Oxfordshire, could help ensure the county can emerge from the lockdown with a strong economy and more resilience.

In order to achieve that, we want to tap into the wealth of knowledge and expertise locally.

We’re inviting you to visit our website <https://www.oxfordshireopenthought.org/> where you will find some more information and some starter questions on climate change, connectivity and living and working for you to consider.

We’d encourage you to explore the site at your leisure and share the link with your friends/family/colleagues/partners so they can too.

You may agree with some of the statements or be totally against others - you can tell us your thoughts about any or all of the topics using the simple online form. You can use text, images and videos – whatever is most comfortable for you to get your views across.

Your submission will then be used to help draw policy ideas for the Oxfordshire Plan 2050, and a summary report will be published ahead of the next formal consultation.

You will also be able to read and react to other submissions on the Open Thought website, creating dynamic debate and continuing the conversation.

Now it’s over to you: visit <https://www.oxfordshireopenthought.org/> and help shape Oxfordshire’s future for the better.

The Oxfordshire Plan 2050 Team

Speedwell House, Oxford, Oxfordshire OX1 1NE

# National News

## Salix finance for public sector energy efficiency projects

Salix Finance, is a government-funded, not-for-profit organisation dedicated to providing interest-free finance for public sector energy efficiency projects.

Despite Covid-19 Salix is continuing to support local councils in accessing this government funding opportunity, even if the project timescales are uncertain.

Since 2004, Salix is proud to have provided over £360 million towards council energy efficiency projects in England. This includes £430,000 provided to 32 local councils, and those projects are estimated to make lifetime energy bill savings of £1.39 million and annual carbon emission savings of 201 tonnes of CO2, which is an excellent achievement for those local councils.

Their goal is to enable and inspire climate action locally, as well as nationally, and to support many more local councils in achieving their climate emergency targets.

For projects at early stages Salix is happy to provide technical support and guidance to councils, and can feedback on a loan value to help with decision making without an obligation to formally apply. Eligible technologies include upgrading to LED street lighting, installing solar panels, and improving building efficiency with insulation and heating.

Salix has recently posted a blog about Sywell Parish Council’s LED street lighting project in Northamptonshire, which is accessible here:[www.salixfinance.co.uk/Sywell\_Parish](http://www.salixfinance.co.uk/Sywell_Parish). This article explains the benefits of completing an LED street lighting upgrade that could be of interest to your council.

More information here <http://www.salixfinance.co.uk/about-us>

## Practical guidance to help village halls reopen - Phillip Vincent, ACRE



Action with Communities in Rural England (ACRE), the national charity which champions and supports community-led projects and assets in the countryside, has today published comprehensive information that will help village and community halls reopen once government coronavirus restrictions are lifted.

*We know that up and down England village halls support close to 300 different kinds of activities across England and for a busy hall, finding the time between bookings to clean to Covid-19 requirements will be a challenge.*

On Monday 15 June the government changed the rules to permit holding indoor markets in community buildings and it is expected that wider reopening of these important assets will be allowed from 6 July.

Deborah Clarke, ACRE’s Rural Evidence and Village Halls Manager said, “Over the past couple of months we have been contacted by numerous volunteers who manage village halls wanting to know how and when they can reopen and help their community recover from Covid19. That’s why we’ve been working with relevant government departments to make sense of the emerging regulations and produce this guidance which is tailored to village halls. I encourage all village halls committees to read this information as it will allow them to put in place measures needed to make their buildings safe for use before they are given the green light to open their doors once again”.

ACRE’s [**guidance**](https://acre.org.uk/cms/resources/press-releases/covid-19-information-sheet-opening-your-hall-after-lockdown-15.6.20-final-1.pdf) looks at how village halls can prepare risk assessments, ensure social distancing once open and introduce effective cleaning regimes. There are some practical resources too including checklists, notices for display in halls and sample terms of hire.

There are over 10,000 village and community halls in rural England, and thousands of Community Centres, church halls and similar buildings serving urban areas, all of which are extremely important to their local communities. They host a wide variety of activities for the enjoyment of local residents, creating sociable spaces which play an important role in combating isolation and loneliness, especially with people living alone.

While some have been [hosting essential services](https://acre.org.uk/news/2020-06-03-englands-rural-village-and-community-halls-are-survivors) such as Food Banks, Community Shops and medicine distribution during lockdown, their usual role in time of disaster as an emergency centre has been unavoidably curtailed. Some with pre-schools have remained open for families of essential workers and since 1st June others have re-opened for pre-school.

Louise Beaton, ACRE’s Community Halls Consultant Adviser said “It’s a huge credit to the volunteers who manage village and community halls that they have been able to manage closure, keep an eye on security and maintenance and now think through the complexity of re-opening halls with multiple meeting spaces of different sizes, for a wide variety of different uses. We know that up and down England village halls support close to 300 different kinds of activities across England and for a busy hall, finding the time between bookings to clean to Covid-19 requirements will be a challenge.”

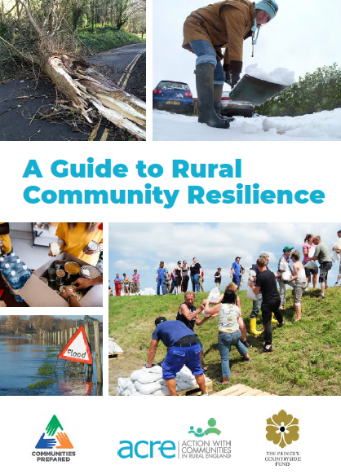
It may be difficult for some village halls to re-open for public use in July because of financial concerns. Many halls rely on bars, cafes, fetes and dances, wedding receptions and private parties to generate income and subsidise community use of the building. It is not yet clear from government whether these more crowded activities will be allowed until later in the year.”

Many halls have been eligible for the £10,000 Retail, Hospitality and Leisure Grant, which has covered fixed costs during closure. However, there are some which are ineligible. For these halls, and those with higher fixed costs or a financial dependency on uses which continue to be prohibited, ACRE hope that additional funding will be made available to help with longer term recovery. It will only be during autumn that the full costs to these halls will become apparent, when heating and the extra costs of cleaning, providing hand sanitiser etc. mount up.

**Download the guidance here** [https://acre.org.uk/cms/resources/press-releases//covid-19-information-sheet-opening-your-hall-after-lockdown-15.6.20-final-1.pdf](https://acre.org.uk/cms/resources/press-releases/covid-19-information-sheet-opening-your-hall-after-lockdown-15.6.20-final-1.pdf)

## Building resilience in rural communities

**Communities Prepared (a Groundwork South programme) and** [Action with Communities in Rural England (ACRE)](https://acre.org.uk/) **have published a new guide to help rural communities become more resilient in the face of emergencies.**

Drawing on the experience of local rural charities and existing initiatives, the guide provides practical tips for rural residents to prepare for, and help each other, at times of crisis. It shows how volunteer groups can be set up to develop emergency plans that identify local risks, and maps out the resources and support that can be mobilised should situations arise that threaten the health, wellbeing and livelihoods of people in the local area.****

The threat can be from any source - flooding, terrorism, pandemic, snow. The guide has case studies and examples -

<https://www.communitiesprepared.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/A-Guide-to-Rural-Community-Resilience.pdf>



## Parish online writes…

"*We’re excited to launch a new feature for Parish Online; the Map Mask. This highly-requested feature modifies the map view to make your local council the centre of attention!*

*To make maps well you need to display only what’s necessary to make it easy for the reader to interpret and understand the situation. If it’s cluttered and confusing then your reader has to wade through the information to guess what you’re trying to tell them. So producing a good map can often be time consuming to get right.*

*That’s no different with interactive maps. The same challenges exist where you have a wealth of information at your fingertips but you need to choose what you display. Our job at Parish Online is to help you make great maps, and we know that 99% of the time you’re only interested in your own council area. So in our latest release we’ve created a new tool that helps you give focus to your own local council and hides the unnecessary information around it.*

*The new Map Mask tool is an easy-to-use toggle button found in the footer bar that hides the information around your local council area. This immediately gives you a more focused view of your council by drawing the view towards your council boundary rather than the neighbouring councils.*

*There are even different mask options for this new tool. You can have the mask as a faded white, faded black or solid white style which all make the map more engaging.*

*; <*[*https://mcusercontent.com/a0d6e2c89a8c103aa07b248db/images/4a5467d3-0caa-4de2-bb7f-cb66f07f524f.png*](https://mcusercontent.com/a0d6e2c89a8c103aa07b248db/images/4a5467d3-0caa-4de2-bb7f-cb66f07f524f.png)*>*

*We’ve also included the Map Mask in the Print tool, so with a single click of a tick box you can produce a PDF map that includes your Map Mask, allowing you to make beautiful and informative maps.*

*We’ve had many of our subscribers ask for this feature so we’re thrilled to be able to finally include it in Parish Online. We’d love your feedback on it and how it’s helped you make even better maps*!"

## NALC Open letter from Chairman Cllr Sue Baxter



*“As we move to a new phase of the coronavirus pandemic, I want to express my thanks for all your hard work and dedication over the last few challenging months.*

*Our sector stepped up and acted swiftly to support residents and the most vulnerable in our communities by setting up volunteer networks, establishing emergency response groups, opening food banks or offering funding to local bodies. You can read more about your incredible work in our*[***Coronavirus case studies***](https://www.nalc.gov.uk/library/news-stories/3221-coronavirus-case-studies)*publication, which has been shared widely with the government and stakeholders.*

*Just as impressive has been the alacrity with which many local (parish and town) councils have embraced remote working and online meetings to uphold democracy and continue vital work.*

*This crisis has demonstrated how important our sector is in building stronger communities, and we will continue to make the case to the government and others that we should be at the heart of building back communities as we move into the recovery phase.*

*If there are any positives to come from this, it is the greater sense of community spirit and civic action. Our task now is to harness this to support the work of our councils and encourage more people to stand at future elections.*

*I want to pay particular tribute to clerks and council staff, who have diligently kept the show on the road. They are working under immense pressure — having to not only cope with the anxieties we all share but additionally the difficult task of balancing home working with other responsibilities. It is crucial as councillors and local leaders that we recognise their challenge and support their efforts.*

*As the country moves forward, it is imperative as councillors we work closely with clerks and council staff. Maintaining our collective focus to ensure our local councils are well run and safe and that we continue to support our communities and play a pivotal role in leading our places and making the most of the opportunities that lie ahead.*

*The National Association of Local Councils (NALC) will continue to keep you updated through the pandemic with our dedicated*[***coronavirus webpage***](https://www.nalc.gov.uk/coronavirus)*. The page has over 100,000 hits, and I'm delighted our resources have been so useful. We are pleased to make the latest edition of*[***LCR magazine***](https://www.nalc.gov.uk/news/entry/1480-spring-edition-of-nalc-lcr-magazine-goes-digital)*free online — it features a range of topical information to help you.*

*NALC and county associations are working on your behalf to ensure the government is aware of the financial constraints we face and their consequences. We are pressing them for a dedicated package of support, which includes funding. I would ask all councils and councillors to contact their MPs to seek their backing and ask them to lobby the government.*

*Thank you for everything you are doing to support your communities.”*

## National pay negotiations

Published 16th June 2020 by SLCC ©

We have been advised of the NJC union’s positions in response to the Employers final offer.

The GMB Union and UNISON are conducting a ballot of their members, without any recommendation, with a return date of end of July for a response. The Unite Union is similarly consulting its members, with a recommendation to reject the offer, with this running through to the middle of August. It is unlikely to reach a conclusion until late August at the earliest, assuming all unions accept.

As a reminder, the Employers final offer was for:

* a 2.75% increase
* an additional days leave, bringing the entitlement up to 22 days

## Code of conduct Local Government association consultation 2020 **this is important** the lga need to hear from town and parish councils



The Committee on Standards in Public Life [published its report](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/777315/6.4896_CO_CSPL_Command_Paper_on_Local_Government_Standards_v4_WEB.PDF) on 31st January 2019 following a year-long review and wide ranging consultation. There is a separate chapter (5) in its report on town and parish councils. The report’s key recommendations included:

* a new power for local authorities to suspend councillors without allowances for up to six months
* revised rules on declaring interests, gifts and hospitality
* local authorities retain ownership of their own Codes of Conduct
* a right of appeal for suspended councillors to the Local Government Ombudsman
* a strengthened role for the Independent Person
* greater transparency about the number and nature of Code complaints.

**The main points were:**

* + LGA to create an updated model Code of Conduct
  + No requirement for candidates/councillors to publically disclose home address
  + Presumption councillors are acting in an official capacity in their public conduct, including statements on publically accessible social media
  + Extend Regulations to include ‘other interests’ such as trusteeships, management roles on charities etc.
  + Local Authorities to establish a register of gifts & hospitality, requirement to be included in model Code of Conduct
  + **A councillor shouldn’t participate if a member of the public would reasonably regard the interest as prejudicial**
  + Enhanced role for Independent Person at principal council
  + **Councillor can be suspended for up to 6 months but can appeal to Local Government Ombudsman**
  + Criminal offence to be abolished
  + **Parish council clerks to hold an appropriate qualification**
  + **Town and parish councils to adopt code of the their principal authority or the new model code**
  + **Sanctions imposed on parish councillors to be determined by the principal authority**
  + Councillors be required to attend formal induction training by their political party

**Relevant best practice points in the report were**:

* Local authorities should include prohibitions on bullying and harassment in codes of conduct. These should include a definition of bullying and harassment, supplemented with a list of examples of the sort of behaviour covered by such a definition.
* Councils should include provisions in their code of conduct requiring councillors to comply with any formal standards investigation, and prohibiting trivial or malicious allegations by councillors.
* An authority’s code should be readily accessible to both councillors and the public, in a prominent position on a council’s website and available in council premises.
* Local authorities should update their gifts and hospitality register at least once per quarter, and publish it in an accessible format.
* Councils should publish a clear and straightforward public interest test against which allegations are filtered.
* An Independent Person should be consulted as to whether to undertake a formal investigation on an allegation, and should be given the option to review and comment on allegations which the responsible officer is minded to dismiss as being without merit, vexatious, or trivial.
* Where a local authority makes a decision on an allegation of misconduct following a formal investigation, a decision notice should be published as soon as possible on its website, including a brief statement of facts, the provisions of the code engaged by the allegations, the view of the Independent Person, the reasoning of the decision-maker, and any sanction applied.
* A local authority should have straightforward and accessible guidance on its website on how to make a complaint under the code of conduct, the process for handling complaints, and estimated timescales for investigations and outcomes.
* **Formal standards complaints about the conduct of a parish councillor towards a clerk should be made by the chair or by the parish council as a whole, rather than the clerk in all but exceptional circumstances.**
* Monitoring Officers’ roles should include providing advice, support and management of investigations and adjudications on alleged breaches to parish councils within the remit of the principal authority. They should be provided with adequate training, corporate support and resources to undertake this work.
* A local authority should have procedures in place to address any conflicts of interest when undertaking a standards investigation. Possible steps should include asking the Monitoring Officer from a different authority to undertake the investigation.
* Senior officers should meet regularly with political group leaders or group whips to discuss standards issues.

The Local Government Association has been working on the new Code of Conduct and it is out for consultation. **The consultation runs from 8th June to 17th August.** The draft Code can be accessed on the LGA website here<https://www.local.gov.uk/sites/default/files/documents/LGA%20Model%20Member%20Code%20of%20Conduct.pdf>

There is an online questionnaire here <https://research.local.gov.uk/jfe/form/SV_bIupYNXmiJ0xECV>

They are also happy to receive narrative responses from councils via their email address here  [**ModelCode@local.gov.uk**](mailto:ModelCode@local.gov.uk)

**Initial thoughts on the LGA draft Code -**

* The LGA have totally failed to understand or grasp that there are major differences between district/county/unitary councils and our level of local government
* They appear to have replace the word respect with civility, is this semantics or a down grading?
* The Nolan Principles of Conduct in Public Life have been relegated to an appendix
* It has failed to take on board a lot of the recommendations from the Committee on Standards in Public Life report including – Councillor can be suspended for up to 6 months. The harshest sanction in the draft Code is suggested to be “ a bar on attending committees for up to two months” which has little relevance for a parish council without any committees.
* Good that ‘other interests’ such as being a charity trustee are included.
* It is a huge missed opportunity to have a code with teeth. There are no meaningful sanctions.

## Magic mapping data for your council

The MAGIC website provides authoritative geographic information about the natural environment from across government. The information covers rural, urban, coastal and marine environments across Great Britain. It is presented in an interactive map which can be explored using various mapping tools that are included. More than 300 data layers are available on MAGIC. Natural England manages the service under the direction of a Steering Group who represent the MAGIC partnership organisations - Natural England, Defra, Environment Agency, Historic England, Forestry Commission and Marine Management Organisation.



The data layers include Conservation Areas, World Heritage Sites, Woodland Grant Schemes, SSSI’s, RAMSAR sites, Priority habitat Inventory, Millennium Greens, Country Parks and much more. Go to the website here - <https://magic.defra.gov.uk/>

## NALC asks of the government



 In order to mitigate the potential medium and long term impact of increased precepts, reduced service provision and closure of facilities, particularly on large populations and larger local councils, NALC asks that the government urgently bring forward a tailored and targeted package of support including financial assistance:

**Financial support and funding:**

* dedicated Coronavirus Interruption Fund, managed by NALC
* extend eligibility to the Job Retention Scheme, Small Business Grant Fund, Retail, Hospitality and Leisure Grant Fund, Local Authority Discretionary Fund and business rates relief
* payment holiday on loans from the Public Works Loans Board
* fast-track current legislation to exempt public toilets from business rates, backdated to 1 March 2020
* further multi-year deal on council tax referendum principles
* flexibility over spending receipts from Section 106 agreements or Community Infrastructure Levy

**Regulatory freedoms and flexibility:**

* amend Coronavirus Act regulations regarding remote meetings to include parish meetings
* ensure local councils are not held back by a lack of express powers by a temporary extension of the general power of competence to all local councils and removing the Section 137 financial spending limit
* extend deadlines for complying with website accessibility regulations
* borrowing rules extended to cover revenue spending and relaxed requirements to evidence community support

**Effective engagement and other support:**

* establish a single point of contact within the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government at deputy director level or above, with specific responsibility for ensuring effective communications and engagement with NALC and the local council sector throughout the response to pandemic and the recovery phase
* establish regular contact between the nine regional chief executive leads and the respective regional grouping of county associations
* promotional and marketing advice to help local councils with the recovery and get their services and place up and running quickly when restrictions are lifted.

## NALC website accessibility publication

NALC has issued a publication to assist your council to be compliant with the Website Accessibility Regulations <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2018/952/made> We have put it into the Members Area of our website. In summary it covers:

**Requirements**

* Legislation
* Standards
* Exemptions
* Disproportionate burden
* Accessibility statement
* Timing
* Non-compliance

**What you need to do - checklist**

* Have a plan
* Remedy

## Council tax statistics

The Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government published [Council Tax statistics for town and parish councils in England 2020/](https://nalc.us12.list-manage.com/track/click?u=16886b5d6c31eade2f9a50027&id=d4d9825412&e=2593660dc7)21 on 3 June.

This provides information on local precepting authorities (local councils, charter trustees and Temples) and the amount of council tax collected on their behalf by their billing authorities in England. NALC is currently poring over this data and will be publishing its analysis soon.

## Furloughing of staff

The Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme will close on 31 October 2020.

From 1 July, employers can bring furloughed employees back to work for any amount of time and any shift pattern, while still being able to claim CJRS grant for the hours not worked.

From 1 August 2020, the level of grant will be reduced each month. To be eligible for the grant employers must pay furloughed employees 80% of their wages, up to a cap of £2,500 per month for the time they are being furloughed.

More information on the government website here <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/changes-to-the-coronavirus-job-retention-scheme/changes-to-the-coronavirus-job-retention-scheme>

## what have #BLACK LIVES MATTER and Pride got to do with parish councils?

In 2018 NALC’s Diversity Commission reported on the results of its work. To remind you of some of the findings:

* 44% of councillors are over the age of 65;
* 90.5% identify as ‘White British’ (national average 80.5%),
* 0.5% reported as British Asian with none of Chinese ethnic descent;
* 39.2% female (national gender balance is 51% female).

The report is here - <https://www.nalc.gov.uk/news/entry/1101-nalc-launch-new-diversity-report-1>

It could be argued with conviction that this is the rural effect - that the age/gender/ethnicity balance of rural areas is very different to that of urban metropolitan areas and parish councils reflect the rural population.

However, there can be no doubt that parish councillors generally are older, whiter and more male than the national averages.

Can anything be done to improve this and make parish councils more representative of the wider population? There are two aspects to the situation, one is the council as an employer; the other is councillors as elected representatives of their community.

**Does the council have an Equal Opportunities Policy?** There is a template policy in the member’s area of our website. NALC has three Legal Topic Notes 25, 26 and 27 which cover sex, race and disability discrimination. These are important issues, not just from an employment point of view.

Ensure that **when the council employs staff** it throws the net as widely as possible welcoming applications from all those with suitable experience irrespective of their background.

**How can more diverse councillors be encouraged**? Would the council welcome and be able to cope with a blind or physically disabled councillor? Councillors bring their life experiences to the council table, the more diverse the experiences the more rounded the decisions the council is likely to make. All too often it is the usual suspects that come forward, village life would collapse without the usual suspects. But fresh, new voices from different backgrounds, with different life experiences could contribute so much. We know it is very difficult to get anyone at all to stand for election but that shouldn’t stop the council from trying to increase diversity in all its forms.

## Remote council meetings – briefing by Liz Howlett, solicitor

**‘Think before you speak’ and other tips for remote meetings**

Local government has been plunged into a brave new world of meeting remotely by necessity. It has risen to the challenge splendidly and achieved in weeks what would normally have taken years. The speed of the change means thinking through the consequences after, rather than before, the change but we are learning from direct experience, rather than simply speculating, so it is not all bad.

The Local Audit and Accountability Act 2014, section 40, introduced the right to blog or tweet from council meetings and the right to record meetings. From that moment what was said in public at a meeting had the potential to go across the world in seconds. That was a huge change. We were apprehensive (and slightly grumpy about it being introduced with no notice during August) but we coped.

Remote meetings mean that the possibility of being recorded has become an absolute certainty. How we manage information in this new world is not changed merely because it is definitely ‘out there’ now. The importance of doing it well has just moved higher up the agenda.

So, here are a few information governance tips for our new world:

1. **Plan** – think ahead about what is on the agenda and what might arise because of the subject matter. Will it be necessary to discuss personal data or commercially sensitive issues? Is it likely to happen anyway? If so, make clear on the agenda that those topics will be at the end of the agenda and that the public will be excluded. This is nothing new but it is now even more critical and see point 2….
2. **Apply Freedom of Information Act (FOI) exemptions** – use the tests under FOI to justify excluding the public. Remember the ‘public interest test’. You must weigh up the right of the individual to privacy against the public interest in the information being widely available. Refer to the ICO website for detailed guidance on all the exemptions ([www.ico.org.uk](http://www.ico.org.uk)). The ones that affect parish and town councils the most are personal data, commercially sensitive information when receiving bids and legal advice (especially where you are considering legal proceedings).
3. **Use the mute button** – this one is for those controlling the meeting. If you sense someone is about to launch into an inappropriate tirade (or even just a helpful detailed background description of a local person) and you fear that might be an unlawful disclosure of personal data, hit the mute button. You have the power. Use it, but don’t abuse it.
4. **Report unlawful disclosures of personal data -** under the General Data Protection Regulation 2016/679 (‘GDPR’) unlawful disclosures should be reported but there are considerations to weigh up about how serious the breach is and whether a report to the Information Commissioner’s Office (‘ICO’) is needed. Was the data sensitive (or ‘special category’ as it is known under GDPR)? The more sensitive it is, the more likely it is you will need to report it. County Councils and Unitaries handle a great deal of sensitive information (for example, medical records of vulnerable adults). Parish and Town councils handle very little. How much data was disclosed and to how many? You are broadcasting to the world but how many were watching? If you are unsure about whether you should report the breach, seek advice. There is a form on the ICO website for reporting breaches. It is worth looking at that to understand what the ICO requires. The ICO’s priority is how you will ensure the breach does not happen again. What process have you put in place to mitigate the risk of another breach?
5. **The Minutes v the recording.** The minutes remain the legal record of the meeting. This has not changed. The recording may assist writing up the minutes but it does not replace the minutes. Editing a recording takes time and expertise. Whether it is necessary to remove the unlawful breach has to be weighed up depending on the severity of the breach. Seek advice if you are concerned about the public viewing a recording.
6. **Remember not to blur the boundaries** – this is really tricky for everyone. You are sitting at home in your own familiar environment and you are speaking in a formal meeting. This has been an increasing problem for councillors with the growth of social media anyway. Everyone has their own ways of dealing with this. Some like to dress formally. Some like a distinct ‘office space’ in the house.

There are security issues with any of the technology used. Zoom has been subject to a lot of criticism partly because use soared and it was suddenly being used to do things it was never designed for. Zoom has done a huge amount to rectify security concerns (and all systems have vulnerabilities) but consider carefully what is to be discussed and the host should ensure the following security features are in place:

* Waiting room function to be used to control access to meetings.
* Password required to allow access to the meeting. Think about who and how you share the meeting ID or password.
* Attendance monitored throughout the meeting.
* If there are any identity concerns then participants will be sent back to the waiting room until identity concerns are resolved.

In addition:

* Host is responsible for muting and unmuting
* Members do not have ability to unmute themselves
* Members muted throughout unless brought in by Chair
* No renaming
* No (silly) virtual backgrounds
* No sharing of screen
* Disable chat function - The ‘live chat feature’ can be used by malicious people to spread phishing messages. Be vigilant. Don’t click on links or attachments you were not expecting or from meeting attendees you do not recognise.

The objective is to keep it professional and to keep the discussion focused. Very much what we aspire to with face to face meetings really.

Liz Howlett, Solicitor, May 2020

## Please could you assist a Community governance student with their dissertation

*I am currently in my final year of the BA Honours degree in* [*Community Governance*](https://www.slcc.co.uk/qualifications/community-governance/) *with De Montfort University and am undertaking research for my dissertation.*

*The aim of the research is to ascertain whether populism plays a role in local council politics and, if it does, whether it has influenced the way local councils interact. The initial findings of this* [*survey*](https://www.surveymonkey.co.uk/r/BBRYCQZ) *will be presented to academic staff of De Montfort University, Leicester and the Society of Local Council Clerks on 21 July, with the detailed analysis of the* [*survey*](https://www.surveymonkey.co.uk/r/BBRYCQZ) *and subsequent interviews forming the body of my dissertation.*

*There are no more than 20 questions to answer – even though the counter will tell you otherwise. It should take you approximately 5 minutes to answer all questions.*

*Unfortunately, I cannot provide hardcopies of the questionnaire, but am happy to discuss alternative methods for you to participate, if you cannot complete the questionnaire online.*

*Thank you for taking the time complete the* [*survey*](https://www.surveymonkey.co.uk/r/BBRYCQZ) *-* [*https://www.surveymonkey.co.uk/r/BBRYCQZ*](https://www.surveymonkey.co.uk/r/BBRYCQZ)

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# Financial Briefing

**OALC offers its member councils the benefit of advice from Steve Parkinson, our Finance, Audit and VAT advisor. If you have any problems or queries concerning finance, VAT, accounting process or financial governance we will send them on to Steve so that you can benefit from his extensive experience. Please send us an email (**[info@oalc.org.uk](mailto:info@oalc.org.uk) **) with a clear description of your problem with as much background information as possible. We will send it on to Steve and get back to you with his response.**

As part of his work for us Steve writes a short article each month. We will put these articles in our Member’s Area for reference as well. This month it is on

1. **VAT on digital services from other countries**

**Digital services**Where digital services (such as web hosting, downloadable software or e-publications) are bought within the EU (including the UK as we are in a VAT and customs union until 31 December 2020), if the customer is not VAT registered the VAT is charged in the customers country, not the sellers. The VAT charged should be UK VAT (generally 20% unless the supply zero rated), not the VAT rate for the supplier’s country. If the supplier is charging UK VAT and providing a VAT registration number, the council can reclaim it.

A seller from outside the EU may have an EU VAT number, unless they are registered in an EU country, but they should still be charging reclaimable UK VAT.

This is another EU country and is charged VAT at their local rate (for example, 23% for Ireland), VAT charged in other countries cannot be reclaimed by unregistered bodies.

VAT registered councils should quote their VAT number when purchasing services or goods from abroad and are responsible for accounting for UK VAT on their purchases.

This all may change from January 2021, depending on agreements reached with the EU.

**Zoom**Zoom are based in the USA (which doesn’t have VAT) and appear to issue a VAT invoice (UK VAT at 20%) without their registration number, which is EU528003555.<https://support.zoom.us/hc/en-us/articles/360021487812-EU-VAT-Tax>

**Guidance**Guidance is available online from HMRC, please read it:  
<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/the-vat-rules-if-you-supply-digital-services-to-privateconsumers>   
<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/vat-imports-acquisitions-and-purchases-from-abroad>

1. **Payments for working from home**

**Homeworking Allowance**Employers can reimburse employees for reasonable **additional costs** they incur while working at home under homeworking arrangements. This will include the additional costs of heating, lighting and metered water. Any increased charges for Internet access, home contents insurance or business telephone calls can also be covered, but not a portion of existing bills where there is no increase.

Council tax does not increase because of home working, but in the unlikely event that homeworking leads to liability for business rates the additional cost could be reimbursed. An employee has no automatic right to any payment of expenses for working from home, unless agreed by the employer (either upon appointment or later), preferably in writing.

**Tax exempt payments**If an employer has chosen to pay a homeworking allowance, they can pay up to:  
• £4 a week/£18 per month prior to 5 April 2020, or  
• £6 a week/£26 per month from 6 April 2020  
and treat these payments as exempt from tax, without further evidence, provided that:  
• The employee needs to work from home (HMRC’s online guidance says *“either because equipment they need is not available at their workplace, or their work means they have to live too far away from the workplace to travel there every day”*, but Section 316A of the Income Tax (Earnings and Pension) Act 2003 simply says *“regularly performs some or all of the duties of the employment at home”*)  
• the amount paid is not more than their additional household expenses  
• the amount paid is not more than the current weekly limit

**Payments above the limit**A payment above the weekly limit can still be tax-exempt, but the employee must provide (and the employer must retain) evidence of their additional costs (for example, extra gas, electricity and water) and the payment must do no more than cover these costs.

Employees will need to identify the additional cost of heating, lighting, water and power. This could be based on the energy usage of the equipment, the hours of use involved and the charges they are paying to the utility providers. Equipment power consumption can be found in the manual or on the manufacturer’s website.  
  
**Multiple employers**Where two or more employers pay the same person a homeworking allowance, they can each pay up to £18/£26 a month tax free, provided that each employer is satisfied that the total amount paid (£36/£52 if there are 2 employers) does not exceed the additional household expenses involved.

If the amounts paid exceeds the employee’s extra costs, anything extra is taxable pay.

**Telephone and internet**Where a council reimburses telephone and internet costs, these are only exempt from tax in certain circumstances and the council should read the guidance carefully or take specific advice on the individual circumstances. If an employee already has telephone and internet connection, a contribution towards the existing cost is likely to be taxable. Only where a specific connection is provided solely for business use is the payment likely to be exempt from tax and National Insurance. Any such payments should be supported by evidence of the costs involved.

**Equipment**Where an employer provides equipment, services and supplies to an employee who works from home, they do not have to report this or pay tax or National Insurance if these are only used for business purposes, or if private use is insignificant. This is different from a homeworking allowance, which is about extra household costs.

**Guidance**Guidance on all types of expenses is available online from HMRC, please read it:  
<https://www.gov.uk/expenses-and-benefits-a-to-z>   
<https://www.gov.uk/expenses-and-benefits-homeworking>   
<https://www.gov.uk/expenses-and-benefits-homeworking/whats-exempt>   
<https://www.gov.uk/expenses-and-benefits-home-phones>   
<https://www.gov.uk/expenses-and-benefits-mobile-phones>   
<https://www.gov.uk/expenses-benefits-subscriptions-professional-fees>   
<https://www.gov.uk/expenses-and-benefits-travel>   
<https://www.gov.uk/hmrc-internal-manuals/employment-income-manual/eim21611>   
<https://www.gov.uk/hmrc-internal-manuals/employment-income-manual/eim01472>

**Disclaimer**This guidance is issued to assist in finding and understanding the relevant legislation and guidance. It is not a statement of law, nor does it account for individual circumstances. The Parkinson Partnership LLP accepts no liability for any loss arising from situations where users of this guidance note have not followed the law and HMRC guidance.

# Employment Briefing

Employment law is complex and specialized. OALC can assist with general employment queries but we retain the services of Chris Moses, Personnel Advice and Solutions Ltd. to provide expert advice to our member councils. We have retained Chris for four hours per month available free of charge to member councils. OALC pay for this, because we believe it is an important and valuable service to our members.

**Coronavirus Job Retention Grant Scheme - Flexible Furlough Leave Update - 24th June 2020**

As you are no doubt aware, the Government has announced that workers who were on Furlough Leave before the 10th June 2020, can return to work on a Part Time/Reduced hours basis from the 1st July.

* It is up to Employers to decide what hours should be worked, as long as they would fall within Employees normal hours of work.
* Staff will get paid 100% of their normal hourly rate of pay for the hours that they work.
* Employers will be able to claim 80% of the difference between the part time worked hours, and the workers contracted hours, through the Job Retention Grant.
* Employers will need to get an updated “Flexible Furlough” Agreement signed, see attached.  This would probably be signed by the worker on the day they start their part time/reduced hours.
* The original Furlough Leave Agreement stated that workers could be recalled at short notice.  As long as Employers provide “reasonable” advance notice, and the part time hours are during the workers normal hours, the Employer is within their rights to make this request.

## Training and development

All councils should encourage their clerk to undertake relevant and appropriate training; all councillors should be committed to doing training too and there should be a council training budget.

The current mentoring session has changed from face to face to online. Well done to all those undertaking the work – Liz, Laura, Marzia, Rachel, Martin, Annie, Sarah and Tracy.

**NEW CILCA ONLINE MENTORING SESSIONS PLANNED FOR THE AUTUMN** starting 7th October 3hr Zoom sessions (October, November, January and March) Cost £275 per person in total for all four sessions. Please contact OALC [info@oalc.org.uk](mailto:info@oalc.org.uk) to register your interest.

## OALC Training programme - the future

OALC has taken the decision to move all its training online via Zoom until the end of the year. 

We usually plan our training program a year in advance. In August when it is supposed to be quieter (!) we sit down and consider courses, subjects, trainers; what went well, what could have been better, what subjects might be on the horizon and plan accordingly.

This year a spanner was thrown in the works. We know and understand that councillors enjoy and appreciate the interaction that comes with face to face training; the social interaction over coffee and hearing about how other councils do things. It can be a revelation for some councillors to find out that the way they have always conducted council business is either wrong or could be hugely improved upon!

However, we have had to decide what is sensible and prudent now. Social distancing is being relaxed but there must continue to be sensible caution about close contact; the age demographic of councillors in general also indicates it is wise to continue with social distancing. So all our trainers have been prevailed upon to rewrite (compress) their presentations into a shorter format for online. We are keeping the numbers restricted to 15 so all attendees can get their questions answered and benefit from a level of interaction.

There are positives and negatives to the online training experience but in the circumstances we really don’t have much choice.

We will review as we go along, the future may end up being a mixture of online and smaller face to face training in larger rooms. We don’t really know what 2021 will look like but we will do our best to continue to provide quality training in a safe format.

All courses can be booked online here <https://www.oalc.org.uk/events>

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| 15th July | Chairmanship skills  Converted to online  FULLY BOOKED | 11am – 1pm | Elizabeth Howlett |
| 23rd July | Councillor Fundamentals  New online | 2pm | Kim Bedford |
| 20th August | Councillor Fundamentals  New online | 6.30pm | Kim Bedford |
| 7th September | Councillor Fundamentals  New online | 7pm | Kim Bedford |
| Wednesday 9th September | The Experienced Councillor  Converted to online  Chairing and Facilitation skills  Converted to online | morning  afternoon | Frances Webster  Wellers Hedleys |
| Wednesday 23rd September | Roles and Responsibilities for new councillors and clerks  Converted to two online sessions on the same day booking available soon |  | Elizabeth Howlett |
| Wednesday 21st October | Financial management for councillors  Budgeting & financial control not Procurement as previously advertised  Converted to online | 10.30am  2pm | Steve Parkinson |
| Sat 7th November | Roles and Responsibilities for new councillors and clerks  Converted to two online sessions on the same day booking available soon |  | Elizabeth Howlett |

# vacancies

**North Hinksey Parish Council is seeking a new Clerk and Responsible Financial Officer (RFO)**

North Hinksey Parish Council (NHPC) is seeking an energetic and enthusiastic professional to become its new Clerk and its Responsible Financial Officer (RFO). While these can be separate roles, the current post holder has undertaken both, and we would prefer to continue this arrangement although job sharing is a possibility. North Hinksey is a busy Parish at the western boundary of Oxford, benefitting from the city’s history and resources but retaining its own community-minded identity. With a population of c.5000 people and an annual Precept of in the region of £90k, we are an active Parish Council with 14 members who provide leisure facilities, green spaces, annual events and local services for the community through 7 committees.

As Clerk you will provide administrative support for all NHPC activities and advise the Council on legal, personnel, planning, and regulatory matters related to Council business. You will attend all Council and Committee meetings, requiring evening work on pre-set days. As a successful applicant you will demonstrate attention to detail, proficiency in Microsoft Office (primarily Word and Excel), a friendly and professional communication style, and excellent organisational and time-management skills. CiLCA qualification and work experience within Local Government are highly desirable.

As Responsible Financial Officer (RFO) you will administer all of the Council's financial affairs. This will require experience with financial/accounting practices, a good working knowledge of Income and Expenditure bookkeeping, VAT, balance sheet reporting and use of commercial accounting software.

The combined Clerk and RFO appointment is a full-time position of 37 hours per week. We will also consider part-time job share, particularly for applicants with previous Clerk/RFO experience. The successful candidate's salary will be based on skills and experience and will fall within NJC pay scales 23 to 25 (£26,999 to £28,785 per year).

North Hinksey Parish Council has a number of exciting projects on the horizon, and we look forward to working with you as our Clerk/RFO to support our dynamic community. To discuss the post further, please contact us at: [clerk@northhinksey-pc.gov.uk](mailto:clerk@northhinksey-pc.gov.uk)

More details and a full job description are available at: [www.northhinksey-pc.gov.uk](http://www.northhinksey-pc.gov.uk)

C.f. grades 26 to 30 in 2018 was £23,866 to £27,358, the equivalent grades are 19 to 24 in 2019 equivalents and £24,799 to £27,905. This could be expended **to grades 18 to 25 to cover all grades within the scale 5 and SO1 bands which is £24,313 to £28,785**. Above grades are just the grades in SO1, whereas for a less qualified candidate we would want the option of a lower grade.