



BREAKOUT GROUP FEEDBACK FROM SALC CONFERENCE
HELD ON 19th OCTOBER 2023

INTRODUCTION

Attendees at the SALC conference on the 19th October 2023 were asked ***to identify the biggest blockers Parish and Town Councils are facing and possible solutions***. This document is a collation of comments made by Parish and Town Councils on the day. Some of the feedback will not apply to your Parish or Town Council. In some instances, you may find that your comments may not have been captured so do feel free to send them over to us at office@surreyalc.c.uk.

Solutions noted in this document are solely those that were suggested in the conference breakout session. SALC will be working on its own solutions to help set its focus supporting Parish and Town Councils going forward and we would urge you to talk through this document and identify what is applicable to your Council and what solutions you can implement yourselves.

BLOCKERS WITHIN PARISH & TOWN COUNCILS

STAFFING

- Lack of staffing and ability to fill vacancies is creating an inability to deliver projects.
- Working from home has impacted Clerks ability to carry out their job in some instances.
- Lack of clarity on status of the Clerk. Status needs to be clear, and role respected.

COUNCILLOR RECRUITMENT

- Lack of Councillors & volunteers in general to assist Parish Councils with their increased workloads. Raising retirement age risks reducing the pool of possible Councillors further.
- Lack of residents understanding of the role of a Parish Councillor and what Parish and Town Councils do.
- Lack of expertise within the Councillor pool.
- Inability to hold remote Council meetings is limiting the ability of Parish and Town Councils for the younger generation to stand who have work or family commitments.
- Adverse effect of social media putting people off standing.

BLOCKERS WITHIN PARISH & TOWN COUNCILS

COUNCIL ROLES & RESPONSIBILITIES

- How can Parish and Town Councils work best as a team? There is a need to allocate out clear roles and responsibilities e.g. footpaths, cemetery.
- Quality of Chairperson. They must be a good facilitator.
- Personal agendas are stopping collective vision and things getting done. One team working needed with clear Parish plan.
- Parish and Town Councils need help with vision and mission creation with clear plan of action and delegation.
- How to educate on the role of Councillors? Inductions, new Councillor manuals and training? Clarity needed on Roles and Responsibilities particularly if coming from the private sector. How to understand the scope of the role and find information?

COMMUNICATION

- What are the best channels for communicating with all residents and getting feedback? Advice Hubs? Household Surveys? Stalls at fairs?
- How to share community good news stories?
- How to navigate social media?

BLOCKERS WITHIN PARISH & TOWN COUNCILS

FUNDING

- How to win funding ? There is a need for a funding 'digest'. Who is winning funding and how?
- Funds – Parish and Town Councils competing with non-parished areas.
- Lack or loss of grants in some areas.

OTHER

- Confusion over who owns what which can have a negative reflection on Parish and Town Councils.
- Concerns over the long term sustainability of sector.
- How to understand ethnicity issues within communities?
- Parish and Town Councils can feel like they are only here for complaints.
- Local interpretation of national legalisation e.g. CIL
- The need for multiple tenders and understanding the different thresholds.

BLOCKERS WITHIN PARISH & TOWN COUNCILS

POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS IDENTIFIED FOR SOME OF ABOVE ISSUES

- Create Parish and Town clusters and meet quarterly to share learnings.
- No central co-ordination or transparency of current cross Parish and Clerk groups. Could SALC map out all the current Clerk and interparish groups and facilitate a structure covering all.
- Training through SALC.
- Tell SALC, your Borough or District Councillor and Surrey County Councillor if you are having problems – Engage with them.
- Time Management. Focus Council time on the main priorities.
- Advertise on Social media. Tell People what the Council Does. Go to local shows.
- Make meetings more interesting and relevant.

BLOCKERS CREATED BY BOROUGH/DISTRICT AND COUNTY COUNCIL

STAFFING & COUNCILLORS

- Lack of direct points of contact and designated officers to whom Parish Councils can turn.
- Staff turnover at the principal authorities makes it hard to build lasting relationships with officers.
- Lack of staff in general and local knowledge within District and Borough Councils.
- Lack of presence of Borough, District and County Councillors at Parish Council meetings and engagement inconsistencies.

COMMUNICATION

- Poor communication in general.
- No Parish Council liaison meetings by Surrey County Council which do exist in most cases with Borough and District Councils.
- Lack of communication from the principal authorities on notifying resident of their roles and responsibilities and the impact that has on Parish and Town Council time.

LACK OF RESPECT & CONSULTATION

- Lack of relationship with County Council and feelings of being in a partnership since restructure.
- Lack of recognition of the role of the Parish and Town Councils by Borough, District and County Councils and lack of understanding that Parish and Town Councils are, in fact, statutory bodies. There is a need to communicate the benefits and role of Parish and Town Councils upwards.
- Lack of local consultation with Parish and Town Councils on projects by Borough, District and County Councils including the County's restructure. Decisions presented as being made already.
- Parish and Town Councils want to feel like they are being listened to.

BLOCKERS CREATED BY BOROUGH/DISTRICT AND COUNTY COUNCIL

PLANNING

- Lack of planning enforcement, and planning enforcement staff. Some enforcement cases have been open for over 12 years.
- Lack of planning officers and a need to bring back Planning Pre-application advice in some Borough and Districts.
- Delays in planning applications being processed.
- The lack of notification regarding planning applications. Tandridge has a process for erecting planning notices which places the emphasis on the applicant to erect the planning notice. Apparently, Guildford Borough Council still erects notices in Conservation Areas.
- Parish and Town Councils planning views are being ignored by Borough and District Councils and they aren't receiving feedback.
- Parish and Town Councils views should be given more weight.
- Parish Councils are not a statutory consultee for Planning Applications.
- The negative impact of large housing developments on small villages and lack of supporting infrastructure.
- The goal posts keep changing at national level creating planning chaos and concern that green belt is being eroded.
- Parish Councils usually don't have budgets for planning experts to support their cases.
- The duty to co-operate with the provision of housing, which has seen homes built in Surrey because Sussex could not provide sufficient dwellings, and the lack of infrastructure being provided to resolve the traffic problems that come with thousands more homes.
- Infrastructure - Lack of future planning of resources where there is new development.

BLOCKERS CREATED BY BOROUGH/DISTRICT AND COUNTY COUNCIL

OTHER

- Numerous complaints being received and submitted on grass verge cutting. Surrey County Council don't seem to be able to cope with the task.
- Parish Councils on County boundary lines often struggle to get support from Borough and District Councils.
- Projects/sponsorship being blocked.
- More support needed with unauthorised encampments.
- More support needed with flooding on Highways.

POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS IDENTIFIED FOR SOME OF ABOVE ISSUES

- Replicate Flood Forum with MPs elsewhere in the County e.g. Normandy
- Parish and Town Councils need to proactively engage with their Borough and District Councils.
- Parish and Town Councils need to make material consideration based on Planning policy clear in their planning feedback.
- Parish and Town Councils need a point of contact for escalation at SCC Highways – Relationship managers? Local Area Committees?
- Communicate the benefit of Parish and Town Councils to Borough, District and County Councils – SALC to facilitate.

BLOCKERS CREATED BY THE POLICE

- Poor communication with Surrey Police – Lack of response from the Borough Commander in Guildford.
- A lack of consistency due to staff turnover at Surrey Police. Some Parish's lack a PSCO contact. Police have noted they are struggling to recruit.
- Lack of enforcement of Speed limits.
- The length of time it takes police to deal with speeding offences.
- Speeding in villages. Speed cameras help but need more enforcement.
- Speedwatch Flashing signs are proving challenging - Time to install.
- Inconsistent use of CCTV. Lack of clarity on police policy with regards to CCTV.
- HGV restrictions
- Use of ANPR?

POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS IDENTIFIED FOR SOME OF ABOVE ISSUES

- 6 monthly meetings between local groups of Parishes and Police to raise issues.

OTHER BLOCKERS IDENTIFIED

- Poor communication links with National Highways.
- Abuse of emergency utility powers by Utility firms.
- Ineffective Members of Parliament. A lack of consistency at that level of Government.
- Party Political issues. Creates a lack of collaboration within Parish and Town Councils and across government tiers.
- Unmanaged Devolution - Increased responsibilities for Parish and Town Councils without the provision of funding to be able to support those additional responsibilities.
- The introduction of a Unitary Authority will lead to a different role for Parish and Town Councils. More powers will be needed.
- Poor broadband in some areas.
- Gatwick expansion.
- Trolling and abuse online.

NEXT STEPS

- 1. We suggest that you review this document as a Council and discuss what applies to you and whether you can identify and implement any solutions yourselves.***
2. At SALC we will be sharing feedback with Borough/District and Surrey County Council, and we will be asking them to work up how they can overcome the problems identified.
3. SALC will be reviewing all feedback at our Strategy Away Day this December and we will identify what we can do to assist in helping overcome the obstacles Parish and Town Councils are facing. We hope to be able to share with you our ideas and plan of action on our Clerk Networking Call at 10am on the 23rd April and Councillors Networking Call at 19h30 on the 24th April.