

CLERK'S INFORMATION REPORT

DECEMBER 2019

For other information items, see the agenda for the meeting of 16 December 2019.

Town and Parish Council Conference – 20 November 2019 (Report by Councillor M Docker)

Unlike previous years, there were, disappointingly, no information stands staffed by senior departmental managers, such as highways etc.

This was also the first time that the new heads of departments had been seen - virtually all the CEC people, other than Brian Reed, were new appointees, with one or two only having been in post for weeks! This all followed the change of the Council make-up following the May elections. Jackie Weaver (Chief Officer – Cheshire Association of Local Councils [ChALC]) also gave a presentation about the role of ChALC, which was well received.

The New Homes Bonus was discussed, and, in my view rather fudged, with the message seemingly quite opposite to the view from the floor!

The more interesting presentations were both given by Brian Reed, Head of Democratic Services and Governance. The first was on the Community Governance Review which is being undertaken (Members will recall that this was an agenda item at the Parish Council meeting on 18 November 2019.) As noted in the report submitted to the Parish Council, the timeframe is completion in 2022 in time for the next local government elections in 2023. The current survey is the initial fact-finding, with the aim to mitigate against the effects that new roads have had in dividing communities and re-balancing the sizes in some cases so as to have a more consistent ratio of councillors (both Town and Parish) to residents. It was noticeable that other Town Councils were also keen to 'capture' the many new outlying housing developments from the parishes surrounding their towns, just as Nantwich is proposing. I wasn't aware of any Nantwich councillors in the meeting.

Brian Reed's second presentation was on the future of the CEC Mayoralty - does CEC need a mayor rather than letting the Town Mayors step in instead? If a CEC Mayor is retained, should the role be revised and possibly less formal? The points were only raised for future consideration, rather than any discussion in the meeting. The consequences of changing from a Leader and Cabinet to a Chairman and Committee set up for Council governance was also raised. The main difference, I learned, was that committees are politically-balanced so that the political 'colour' of a Member, rather than his/her competence, becomes the main criterion, which is not the case with the cabinet arrangement. CEC has voted and agreed to revert to the Committee/Chairman model.

Other topics were the Pre-Budget consultation (this also featured on the Parish Council's agenda on 18 November 2019 and will be considered again at the December meeting).

It was announced that a balanced budget is now achievable, and the review of staff culture - the way they think, effectively - with a view to the staff operating a more 'can do' attitude rather than 'no, not possible', and better due diligence for such areas as planning for example.

Finally, it was announced that it is intended that there will be Conferences every 6 months in future and the re-introduction of information stands is seen as a priority.

In the Question and Answer session at the end, I was able to raise my points about signage and lack of trimming of trees and bushes, which seemed to strike a chord with the meeting and generated several follow-up observations of examples where signage, especially speed signage is no longer clearly visible.

M Docker
Parish Councillor