

Succession Planning

Adopted at Full Council meeting on 25th January 2021

Minute reference 200/20/21

Action point from Council meeting on 26th October 2020: Agree a model for succession planning in relation to key roles and major projects. Cllr Williams will bring a report on the way forward on this issue to a future Full Council meeting.

Although Charlton Kings Parish Council has a 25-year history, being first parished in 1995, it is only since around 2010 that it has developed the degree of professionalism and outreach that is needed in order to deliver better outcomes for Charlton Kings people. However, succession planning has never been considered, either for staff or councillors, and orderly transitions have simply emerged. Over the last three Council terms since 2010, there has been relative stability by having most councillors serving the full 4-year term of a Council (Annex 1).

There are no policies or processes in place that govern succession to posts or roles. This is becoming potentially problematic, as fewer councillors now serve for a full four-year Council term, and with increasing aspirations to develop bigger and more outwardly reaching projects, leaders of Council, committees, and major projects themselves become potential 'single points of failure'. This is also true for staff succession planning.

Staff

Succession planning should not just be about the Clerk/RFO, but about all staff members.

Clerk and Responsible Financial Officer

Until mid-2013, the Clerk had been in post possibly since 1995, and had become the single biggest obstacle to progress. For a number of reasons, the Council subsequently had to employ a succession of temporary Clerks before making another less than satisfactory appointment. Only with the appointment of a CiLCA qualified Clerk in 2015 did we start to enjoy the proper management of Council's business, and this has continued and developed since 2018 with our current Clerk.

It is hard, but not impossible, to develop a succession plan for the Clerk's role. Ensuring that all Council's processes and practices are as good as they can be, and able to be handed over to a new incumbent is essential, but there is more that can be done to ensure organisational resilience and a smooth succession, particularly as the staff team is expanded.

Staff structure

As part of succession planning, we need to develop a more formal staffing structure that has the capacity to expand if circumstances permit. After considerable thought by the Personnel subcommittee, it is recommended that we move to the following structure, which would promote a smooth succession; especially for the time when a Clerk/RFO left the Council.

- ❖ Clerk/RFO (CiLCA qualified)
- ❖ Deputy Clerk (CiLCA qualified)
- ❖ Community Development Officer (and possibly other "Officer" or "Assistant Officer" roles

❖ Administrative Assistant (or Assistants)

A Deputy Clerk would understand and could, if necessary, deputise for the Clerk on a short-term basis if they left suddenly or became incapacitated. Should they wish to, the Deputy could apply for the Clerk role when it was advertised.

Key projects would be covered by the various Officer roles; with Clerk/RFO and/or Deputy Clerk keeping a higher level “watching brief” so they were aware of progress and issues across the whole range of Council’s activities.

There are currently weekly staff meetings and informal “catch-up” sessions, to ensure that staff are familiar with each other’s key work issues. A management structure, and related communication and covering of work portfolios, should be developed in the next year or so, to enable smooth transitions should any staff member leave.

Council

Chair and Vice-Chair of Council

The Council has had a relatively stable membership in the last decade and in the three (four-year) council terms since 2010, there have been just three Chairs: 2010-2012; 2012-2018; 2018-present. After the Clerk, the most influential role in Council is that of Chair. The Chair’s term is for one year only, and they must offer themselves for election at each Annual Meeting of Council in May. The Chair may resign at any time, but it is most helpful to Council if a Chair accepts the role for a full year’s term. A separate, unpublished paper on the role of Chair is available to anyone who may wish to read it.

As the scope and complexity of Council’s business increases, the role of Chair needs to become more focussed on strategic organisation and representation, and less on direct delivery of projects and organisation support.

The role of Vice-Chair has become increasingly important, not only as someone with whom the Chair can validate ideas and direction, but also to be available in the physical or cyber absence of the Chair at both internal and external meetings.

There are very good reasons for a new Chair to have had some experience with the Council and be familiar with the Council’s role, its work programmes, its culture, the ways in which it operates, and the partners with which it works. It has become essential that a Vice-Chair, who would subsequently be willing to accept the role of Chair (if elected), should be elected from existing councillors.

Should no existing councillor be prepared to undertake this role, Council might consider that it would be preferable to advertise for a new councillor to take on the role of Vice-Chair, rather than to elect a reluctant new Chair with little experience of, or willingness to, manage the Council in a year’s time.

Chairs and Vice-Chairs of Standing Committees

Although all Standing Committees have agreed Terms of Reference, the role of Standing Committee Chairs has never been defined. Like the Chair of Council, the role’s true value lies in what is done between the actual committee meetings.

Chairs of Standing Committees are elected at the Annual Meeting of Council in May and, other things being equal, are anticipated to hold the Chair for the year’s term. Vice-Chairs are elected at the first meeting of the committee.

In order to promote succession planning within Standing Committees, Council may consider that Standing Committee Chairs and Vice-Chairs who intend to step down, could give notice before the

first meeting of the preceding year when Chairs and Vice Chairs are approved. This would give a year to prepare for handover.

Certainly, having role definitions would prepare all councillors to understand what they were volunteering to take on if proposed for election.

Councillors leading major projects

Although it has been the case that every project identified in a committee's annual action plan will have a project leader allocated, increasingly, Council has shown itself prepared to adopt significantly bigger projects that make substantial demands on the leading councillor's time and energy. Most projects attract the leadership of individuals with a particular personal or ex-professional interest in that area of work. Smaller projects can quite readily be taken over by another councillor, but larger ones, particularly those requiring some substantial knowledge, e.g. environment, social welfare, youth services, are potentially very vulnerable to the loss of the project leader. Creating a role of deputy project leader, would share the burden and create resilience in the project.

Further thought needs to be given to the way in which major projects are supported by staff, who would add further degree of resilience.

Recommendations

- Ensure that all of Council's processes and practices are as good as they can be, and are reviewed and kept up to date
- Develop a more formal staffing structure that has the capacity to expand if circumstances permit: Clerk, Deputy Clerk, Officer, Assistant
- The Chair needs to become more focused on strategic organisation and representation
- Ideally, a current councillor should be elected to the role of Vice-Chair in the year before being prepared to accept election to the role of Chair
- Wherever possible, Standing Committee Chairs and Vice-Chairs who intend to step down, should give notice before the first meeting of the preceding year when Chairs and Vice-Chairs are approved.
- For major projects, the role of deputy project leader should be created, and further thought given to the way in which each project may be supported by staff.
- The roles of Chair and Vice-Chair of Council, Standing Committees and of leaders of major projects should be formally defined and agreed by Council. This would assist councillors to better understand what responsibilities they were volunteering to take on if proposed for election.
- Appropriate training before taking up a role should be made available. This may be through formal, paid-for courses but also by informal networking with colleagues and partners
- Arrangements may be put in place to shadow an existing Chair if requested
- Although Council has determined that it will follow a truly democratic path by considering the co-option of any resident who puts themselves forward for co-option to Council, it may also seek to indicate that it is actively searching for new councillors who could bring particular expertise and experience in specific fields, e.g. environment.

Annex 1 Membership of Charlton Kings Parish Council 2010-present

Charlton Kings Parish Council: Membership stability			
	Council 2010-2014	Council 2014-2018	Council 2018-2022
Councillors allocated	15	15	17
Total number of councillors sitting in the term	20	18	26
Councillors sitting for 3-4 years	11	11	9 serving for 3 years so far
Councillors sitting for 2-3 years	4	1	5 serving for 2 years so far
Councillors sitting for 1-2 years	2	2	6 still serving
Councillors sitting for 0-1 year	3	4	6 serving for 1 year only