

National Association of Local Councils Annual Conference, Milton Keynes



The Councillor Commission: *The Voice of the Parish Councillor*

Professor Colin Copus

Professor of Local Politics
Local Governance Research Unit,
Department of Politics and Public Policy
De Montfort University, The Gateway,
Leicester, LE1 9BH
Tel: 0116 2577819

 **@ProfCopusLG**

Email: ccopus@dmu.ac.uk
web: www.dmu.ac.uk/lgru

Alistair Jones

Associate Professor
Local Governance Research Unit,
Department of Politics and Public Policy
De Montfort University, The Gateway,
Leicester, LE1 9BH
Tel: 0116 2078787

 **@dmuanjones**

Email: anjones@dmu.ac.uk
web: www.dmu.ac.uk/lgru

Rachel Wall

PhD Researcher and Part-time Lecturer
Local Governance Research Unit,
Department of Politics and Public Policy
De Montfort University, The Gateway,
Leicester, LE1 9BH
Tel: 07944259199

 **@RachWall92**

Email: rachel.wall@dmu.ac.uk
web: www.dmu.ac.uk/lgru

The Councillor Commission





Local Governance Research Unit
The Municipal Journal

The Voice of the Councillor

Final report of the De Montfort University and
Municipal Journal Councillor Commission

2015 -2016

Authors:
Professor Colin Copus
Rachel Wall



Follow us!
@DMULGRU



Introduction

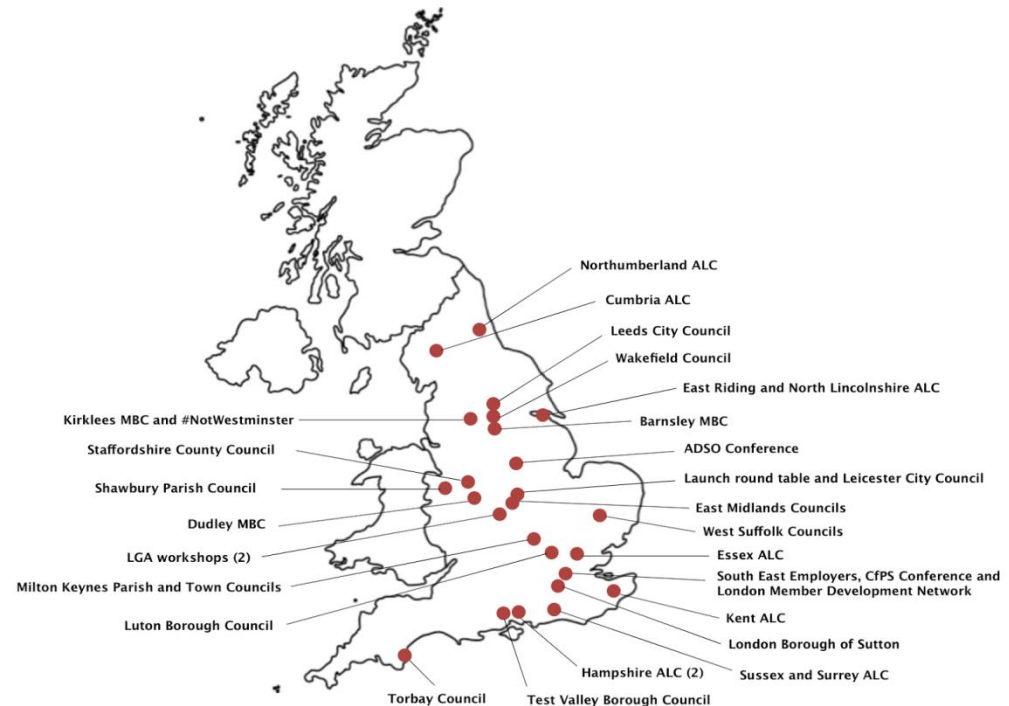
- The Commission
- Our Research
- The main challenges facing Parish councillors
- Parish Councillors: Joining up the Dots
- A 24-hour a day job
- How Parish Councillors See Their Role
- Information
- Parishes and devolution
- Recommendations
- Next steps

The Commission

- Professor Colin Copus (Chair) -Professor of Local Politics, Local Governance Research Unit, De Montfort University
- Heather Jameson -Editor, The Municipal Journal
- Lord Gary Porter -Chairman of the Local Government Association, Leader of South Holland Council
- Councillor Mike Evans -Chairman of Whiteley Town Council, Vice-chairman of Hampshire Ass. Local Councils
- Sir Merrick Cockell -Chairman, UK Municipal Bonds Agency and London Pensions Fund Authority
- Anthony Zacharzewski -Director, Democratic Society
- Jessica Crowe -Head of Customers, Commissioning and Governance, London Borough of Sutton
- Jacqui McKinlay - Chief Executive, Centre for Public Scrutiny
- Rachel Wall (Researcher to the commission) - PhD Research Student, De Montfort University

Our Research

- Started taken evidence in December 2015 – finished evidence collection December 2016
- 31 round table discussions with councillors
- 10 round table with just parishes
- Number of councillors attending round tables (total) – 336
- Number of written submissions – 128
- NALC Survey: 81 responses
- Twitter chat via **@DMULGRU** using **#CllrCommission**





Parish Councillors: Main themes 1

- Globalisation
- Europeanisation (now de-Europeanisation)
- Urbanisation
- Austerity
- Government control
- Relationships with principal councils
 - Community Governance Reviews
- Devolution and double devolution
- Ensuring community cohesion
- Proximity to the community



Parish Councillors: Main Themes 2

- Relationships between councillors, chairman and clerk
- Councillors with more than one hat
- Co-option
- Capacity
- Responsibility without power

Joining up the Dots Locally

Parish councils exist in a fragmented and often chaotic network of competing and interacting agencies and bodies with different:

- Purposes
- Resources
- Policies
- Structures
- Ambitions
- Powers



Most operate beyond the boundaries of any one parish council and have little or no accountability to the public or concern for place

The Parish Councillor (all councillors) A 24 hour-a-day job

- Proximity to the community
 - Based within the community (but may be not the ward or division)
- Ease of access for citizens
 - Visible, contactable, approachable
- Few boundaries between personal, political, council, social or work life
- Use of proximity as a representative tool
- Underestimates of the hours councillors work
- But there's always the 'A' team councillor
(the one if you can find, maybe you can work with)





How Parish Councillors See Their Role

Empower
Enfranchise
Excite and motivate
Lead
Support and advise
Create a dialogue and shared vision
Channel messages and views
Mediate conflicts over local issues

Promote, protect and defend the interests of the parish



What do Councillors Want?

... We want information



... Well, you wont get it

..... By hook, or by crook, we will

Parishes and central policy change

- Frustration – central policy change sometimes prevents councillors from acting, provides barriers
- Too many rules and regulations
- Limited and diminishing pool of resources
- Parish councils are closest to communities
- The expectations that the public has of parish councillors' ability to solve problems locally can be frustrating when central policy change limits their ability

'you can't do that because of paragraph one, subsection 12, para small 6 of blah blah Act of 1853'

Parishes and devolution

- Enthusiasm for more powers, but not convinced current 'offer' can deliver
- Recognised as a top-down process
- *'Voting with a blindfold on'*
- More to do without the money to do it?
- One size does not fit all!
- **Double devolution**
- There is a need for principal authorities to recognise that parishes have a vital role to play in devolution
- Devolution should not be imposed upon parishes as a cost-saving exercise
- Parishes should be sufficiently involved in devolution negotiations



Our Parish Council Recommendations

- A national independent inquiry be undertaken by the National Association of Local Councils to fully understand the relationship between parish and town councils and principal authorities with the aim of identifying best practice and producing a national framework for parish-principal relationships.
- The parish and town council statutory right to be consulted on planning matters be extended to all statutory policies, strategies and plans resting with principal council executives.
- As far as possible parish and town councils avoid appointing to a chair or vice-chair of a town or parish council councillors who also sit on principal authorities.
- The power of principal councils under the Local Government & Public Involvement in Health Act 2007 to conduct Community Governance Reviews be abolished.

Next steps

- Official launch event in Parliament
- Westminster Hall Debate
- Regional workshops
- Producing a handbook/guide for parishes
- Work with other organisations such as the LGA
- Policy papers
- Celebrating and sharing best practice
- Continuing to listen to parishes