

DIRECT ELECTION TO THE SMALLER COUNCILS COMMITTEE NOMINATION FORM

Candidates should complete the nomination form by 8 November 2019 and send it to NALC at nalcccommittees@nalc.gov.uk.

Title	Mrs
First name	Karen
Surname	Forster
Home address	
Contact number	
Email address	
County association	Suffolk Association of Local Councils
Council name	Huntingfield Parish Council & Heveningham Parish Council
Precept	Huntingfield - £ 6,300, Heveningham £ 4,250
Electorate	Huntingfield - 131, Heveningham - 95

Explain why you are standing for this position (250 words max)

I am the Clerk to 2 tiny parish councils in a rural area and gained my CiLCA qualification two years ago. I have worked with other councils on a variety of projects, as a locum Clerk and was previously a Councillor at a large parish.

I am applying for this position as I wish to bring the following to a wider audience and National Body:

I am frustrated by assumptions made about small parish councils by larger corporations such as District and County Councils and other agencies. For instance, that all councillors and parishioners have access to internet to comment on items, or public transport to attend meetings or finances to implement and be educated about new legislation. Large bodies need to consider the resources available to small parishes.

Secondly, small parishes struggle to attract councillors (There are 5 in Heveningham and 5 at Huntingfield). They are spread very thinly trying to attend meetings or share the workload. They are asked to be involved with as many issues as councils with many more members but this cannot be done. There needs to be better balance or greater support for the workload expected.

Thirdly, in my experience, some small parishes are run traditionally with Councillors who have served many years and may not be willing to keep up to date with training and latest legislation. Often, they keep themselves isolated from events being run by outside agencies. I believe that there needs to be ways to reach those people.

Please outline three key achievements, skills or experiences that are relevant to the position applied for (250 words max each)

In my previous work, before I took semi-retirement and changed my career to that of a Clerk, I worked in large engineering/manufacturing companies as a self-employed interim or locum to either run significant projects or manage a major change program in methods, systems and processes. I am a qualified project manager, worked as a senior director and I am used to working with large budgets and within strict legislation.

I have found it interesting that at all the Councils that I have been involved with to date, there has been a need to introduce new and robust financial systems including proper budget controls. Most of these councils are very small and run on a shoe-string where the Clerk is expected to “get on with it” with little training. This is an example of where I think resources are stretched to achieve the level of expected due to lack of resources.

I believe my skill in these cases has been to ensure that Council realise that finances need to be run appropriately with full visibility and provide them with simple, workable solutions to review budget and spending at every meeting. Furthermore, to get them to accept that the Clerk is integral to that process and, as such, should be properly trained and rewarded.

I was asked to take a post as the locum Clerk to a Town Council where the precept is about £84k with a population of 1500. I found that the Council was non-compliant in most areas and required modernising, new financial systems set up, standard policies introduced, and committees created. I organised new premises and completed the required work within a few months as well as introducing a program of training for the Councillors, installing new IT equipment and systems, completing 3-year plan and achieving an audit with no issues. I was instrumental in recruiting a new Clerk on a permanent basis who has settled in well and is continuing to improve the Council.

A lot of this was achieved through working very closely with the Councillors and getting their involvement and commitment to all the changes, ensuring that these issues were dealt with rapidly. Likewise, I used my network within local government to help provide advice and resource when required and introduced relevant people to each other so as to not reinvent wheels. Here I was using my skills in communication, turning around situations and organisation.

I believe that training and networking for Councillors and Clerks is essential but needs to be accessible and tailored to specific needs of councils. I regularly ran training and mentoring sessions in my old career and have found

that useful as a Clerk. Whilst with one of the Councils, I recognised that the Councillors didn't work well together. I created a relaxed training session one evening where everyone briefly introduced themselves to their fellow councillors, detailing careers and hobbies and what skills that brought to the Council. It was very successful and long term it was noticeable that there was more respect of others and that individual's sought advice from Councillors who had specific skills.

To further improve the training for my parish councils and recognising that the current training facility for us and nearby councils is an hour's drive away, I organised with SALC to hold affordable councillor training locally over 2 evenings. Seven very small councils sent councillors which saved them money. They have since requested that this idea is repeated. I have now met with SALC to discuss providing this and other training locally in the future.

These sessions and other initiatives have resulted in better networking between the tiny parishes to solve problems together. For instance, we have had problems with verge and hedge maintenance, so I organised a meeting of 10 tiny parishes with highways to discuss the issues and it was successfully resolved.

Declaration

I declare that to the best of my knowledge the information given on this form is correct and can be copied and distributed to other NALC members.

Signature



Date

7/11/19

