

Farnsfield Parish Council: Review of Governance Report Summary

The attached Note is based on a series of meetings, initially, held with individual Councillors and residents, and then, by way of feedback, to three groups (two groups of Councillors and a group of residents). The report is based on the views, opinions and information provided by all involved. It is not a forensic analysis of systems and procedures etc. After the initial 19 meetings, where issues and information were consistent across the groups, it has allowed a series of themes to emerge, which paint a picture of 'how things are' in Farnsfield. Not everyone will agree with every detail, but the process has allowed a clear picture to emerge of what needs to be examined in greater depth.

Four areas emerge that should form the basis of the next stage of the Review. They are each multi-faceted, and all are inter-related.

1. A Village Plan (a Performance Management process) - In order to know how effective any (public) organisation is, it needs to know what it is trying to achieve. Much flows from this. Farnsfield seems to operate without any sense of direction that is shared among Councillors, or with residents.

2. Roles and Relationships - there appears to be little or no agreement among individuals about the role and appropriate relationship between three groups, Councillors, The Clerk/RFO and the public/Civil Society. This lack of awareness or understanding is the cause of many of the dysfunctional human relationships in the Parish.

3. Finances - financial systems are essential to ensure that the Council's priorities are reflected in its actions and how it funds its activities. They also protect Councillors in a variety of ways, and individuals' roles and responsibilities need to be clear and followed. Financial procedures must be very clear, in order to maximise the use of those funds that are available for all types of expenditure. Evidence to date suggests these systems and procedures are lacking in the way the Parish Council operates.

4. Information Management, Access to Online Admin etc - similarly, information management is a key responsibility of any public body and systems, procedures and behaviours are governed in many cases by statute. Yet, there is significant evidence in Farnsfield that current practices breach the statutory requirements, and this needs to be addressed.

The report also identifies a need to develop both a comprehensive training plan and, post 2027 Parish elections, a mediation process.

One thing that emerged from these initial discussions is that everyone, without exception, felt that the greatest priority was to improve the lives of villagers and to improve the Village. An immediate conclusion that can be drawn from this sentiment is that the current dysfunctional behaviours shown by all 'sides' needs to, and must, stop. Behaving civilly, one to another, is an essential precursor to this Review and its subsequent recommendations. This is something that can, and should, happen immediately. It does not require anyone to become friends; it requires everyone to act reasonably, politely and respectfully. It does not mean ignoring the past; we must learn from the past and change what needs to be changed, but we should not live in the past.

Recommendations

The Parish Council is **recommended** to agree that the four areas identified form the basis of the next phase of the Review. It is further **recommended** that this report should be shared, in full, with all those who participated in the initial stage.

Update, 13th October, 2026: The Parish Council discussed this Note at its meeting on 22nd September and *resolved* that it could be published after all Councillors had an opportunity to have their own Right of Reply included in the final version. Six responses were subsequently received and four have been included in the Addendum attached to the Note.

William Bradshaw,
September/October, 2026

Farnsfield Parish Council: Review of Governance

Summary Note following meetings with Councillors and Residents, 11 - 13 August, 2026, and subsequently on 7 September, 2026

STATEMENT

The content of this summary note is the product of a series of meetings with eight Parish Councillors and nine residents, and is **based solely on what they have said**. It is not intended as a statement of facts, though in some cases supporting documentary and recorded aural evidence exists (that may need further verification). It is a summary intended to capture a 'picture' of current behaviours and practices in the Parish of Farnsfield that most of the participants would recognise, and it has been tested with (most of) the participants in further discussion. Its main purpose now is to identify those areas/issues that need further, in-depth review. It is submitted to Farnsfield Parish Council for further discussion, though it is recommended that it be shared with all those who participated in the meetings and associated wider discussions.

Introduction and Methodology to date

Profile of Farnsfield and the Parish Council

Farnsfield is a small and very picturesque Village, situated roughly halfway between Mansfield and Newark, and approximately 14 miles from the City of Nottingham, set in the County of Nottinghamshire. It is one of 84 Parish Councils within the boundaries of Newark and Sherwood District Council (NSDC). It has a population of around 3,000. It is characterised by rural charm, historic character and vibrant, active and very friendly local community. It is surrounded by rolling farmland, with good access to the local countryside, for example, via the Southwell Trail, which runs along the edge of the Village. Street names reflect the history of the area, including early ties to the Society of Friends ("The Quakers"). Local businesses focus on fairly high end produce (butchers, bakers) with local family ties and established relationships in the Village, with newer restaurant and cafes offering high quality menus. There is a general store operated by The Co-op, that serves wider needs.

Farnsfield is well served by local businesses, sports clubs and societies, and has two traditional pubs at either end of the main street, both within easy walking distance for all villagers. While the Village is clearly quite well-off, there are some less well-to-do areas, and some societies that aim to provide material assistance to some local people, reflecting established and very current struggles with the cost-of-living for some families. There is a healthy, thriving civil society, with many local people willing to contribute and volunteer to deliver practical benefits to the wider community. And its Parish Council is well-resourced (financially secure, with very good community assets, such as the Village Hall), though it has limited annual income available for discretionary spend. Significant additional incomes have been available recently through S106 agreements and the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL). There may be further external funding available in coming years.

The Parish Council is served by a wide range of professional experience among Councillors (and the general population), though over the last decade at least, there has been a large turnover of individual Councillors within the election cycle, though four have remained in place since the 2023 election. The Council had contested elections in 2023 (for the first time in living memory, it seems), resulting in a cohort of Councillors almost entirely new to the role. Since then six Councillors have resigned and six new Councillors have been co-opted, three since the end of 2025.

The most worrying and disturbing fact is the very large turnover of Parish Clerks (a total of nine, including the most recent incumbent), since the 2023 elections.

Taken together, the change in Council personnel represents a serious loss of 'corporate memory' coupled with major disruptions to the way things are run.

A further complicating factor has been the rise in the number of residents who have taken a proactive interest in Parish affairs, some of whom have served on the Council previously. The relationship between current and former Councillors, between the whole Council, clerks and residents has not been harmonious, to say the least, and this is a major factor in making the Council dysfunctional. See below: **"The need to learn lessons from specific issues"**

Initial Steps

Over a number of months since the end of 2025, NSDC staff, led by their Monitoring Officer, urged the then Clerk to commence a review of the Council's Governance arrangements. This arose out of concerns generated by the volume, breadth, variety and complexity of financial, procedural and behavioural issues that the Parish Council seemingly could not deal with and, in fact, was itself a contributory factor. For various reasons, the then Clerk resisted these requests. However, when the Clerk left post at very short notice in April, 2026, the Parish Council agreed to commence a review.

William Bradshaw was asked to undertake the review, working closely with the new Clerk to the Parish and Responsible Finance Officer, Binal Sawjani. The first practical aspects of the review commenced over three days, 11 - 13 August, 2026, with a series of 1:1 meetings in Farnsfield Village Hall. The purpose of the meetings was to gain a wide range of insights into how the Council works - not just the 'mechanics' and 'the rules', but the 'way we do things here', the culture. Both are important in a Review of Governance and need to be addressed alongside each other.

All ten individual Councillors were invited, though only seven attended, initially, and one later asked to join the discussion. The two who chose not to attend are among the longest serving Councillors of the current group, and are perceived by all to be the most influential and active Members of the Council, as well as in various clubs and societies in the Village.

Nine individual residents with a known interest in the working of the Parish, some of whom are former members of the Council, attended, too. Three NSDC officers also attended to provide detailed information surrounding the arrangements for S106 monies. Each meeting lasted approximately one hour, with the focus being on listening to each participant's assessment of 'the way things work in Farnsfield'. Each was a free-ranging discussion and was held under an agreement to operate with the strictest confidentiality.

A few weeks after these initial meetings, each initial participant was invited to a further meeting, where they were provided with an overview of the emerging themes, and the themes/issues that seemed generally to require more detailed review. This Summary note has been amended to try to reflect the views expressed at this subsequent meeting.

Overarching Picture

The overwhelming view of all participants was that there is, now, a complete lack of trust between Councillors and (some) residents, as well as between some Councillors. There are several reasons for this. Communications from the Council are described as "risible", with some residents (justifiably) saying there is a lack of transparency - in fact, seemingly a deliberate policy not to reveal key information - with some Councillors showing an attitude of arrogance and condescension in meetings and in correspondence. Resident behaviour, both in formal meetings and via online activities (emails, social media fora etc) is described as "aggressive", "rude" and "threatening". For both 'sides' there seems to be a lack of accountability and few, if any, consequences for (some very serious) actions, though the Council's 'Vexatious' policy has sought to limit the input of a small number of residents.

Furthermore, there are incredibly poor, almost non-existent, financial systems; some evidence to suggest, at best, a cavalier attitude by some Councillors to pay due regard to minuted decisions, or even to act without a minuted decision to authorise such actions; there is no evidence whatsoever of performance management of projects, policies or procedures; or, until recent weeks, any robust and

effective communications between Councillors and the Clerk(s). Some Councillors seem to ignore the professional advice offered by the Clerk or they do not understand what their role is in relation to the Office.

Despite advice on several occasions to declare an interest in key decisions, some Councillors have behaved in a manner that has *encouraged an impression* that they were exercising favouritism for certain clubs, acting in a self-serving manner regarding funding bids/allocations, or at least being unwilling to provide the criteria used to support those decisions. As a consequence, there has been (wholly avoidable) persistent allegations of 'corruption', regardless of whether any such activity exists ! It then seems, for some residents, all further actions by (some) Councillors are seen through a prism of 'that Councillor's self-interest', and many other (quite possibly innocent) actions are viewed as motivated to meet that 'self-interest', spawning further accusations of 'cronyism', and worse. Any senior Council Officer would advise any Member to *always err on the side of caution*. If there *appears to be a perception* of an interest, declare it! Not to do so, as seems to be the case here, is an avoidable own-goal that has led to a great deal of the dysfunctionality of the Council as a whole.

There are, very worryingly, persistent reports of a Councillor-led 'caucus', involving serving and former Councillors and members of the public, which meets regularly. This alleged caucus has earned the name 'Plough Sunday'. Only the participants in these alleged meetings can say what is discussed. One Councillor, who attends these gatherings, categorically denied that any Council business was ever discussed among this long-standing group of friends. In the current climate, however, given the commonalities of 'attendees', it is not surprising that some residents believe 'Plough Sunday' is a primary driver of Parish Council policy and decision-making. The NSDC Monitoring Officer is investigating this matter, though it is unlikely to prove anything beyond one person's version of events versus another's speculation.

All of this has created an atmosphere and culture of disruptive, and occasionally aggressive, behaviour by Councillors and residents, causing other residents (and no doubt some now former Councillors) to feel threatened. One Councillor described the situation on all sides as "childish and pathetic". Another felt that some of the public interventions were "vindictive". Other participants expressed concern about 'cronyism' and 'corruption' (though much of the evidence offered for this is ambivalent, at best). In addition, there are large sums of public money that can not, officially, be accounted for, and equally large sums of money being spent on external auditor fees, due to the Council's failure to establish or abide by simple financial rules and procedures, and usually no evidence of significant expenditures demonstrating value for money or even any wider public good from Council funded projects. Much of this may be a result of the constant changes in the Clerkship, but in such circumstances it behoves those making the decisions, and acting on them, to do so in as transparent a way as possible (for their own reputations), and to adhere to those rules that do exist, as these are designed to protect, not to inhibit.

Looking Forward

Perhaps the most interesting, and I think, most hopeful thing about each meeting was that everyone agreed on one thing. **Everyone**. Using different words, everyone said something along the lines of:

"I am here to improve the lives of the people of Farnsfield and to maintain and promote the Village as a place to live, work and thrive"

Usually, unprompted, always said sincerely, these seemed to be genuine sentiments. There may well be other motives, some less noble, but this was a universal view, which would certainly be shared by everyone in Farnsfield, and many residents assume this is the case, anyway.

If it is true, then no one should continue, or allow to continue, the behaviours and practices of the last several years. Several people have been caused great distress due to these behaviours, even in just the last few weeks - tears shed, visible and expressed anxiety - that should not happen in a civilized polity. There are many reports of extremely poor behaviour including aggressive and threatening behaviour (by a named Councillor), swearing, disruption of meetings, and on-going bullying of one Councillor by others. This is a very dark - and unnecessary - aspect of life in Farnsfield, not just

confined to Parish Councillors. **Everyone** has a responsibility to deal with this, primarily by maintaining a civil approach at all times, to everyone, regardless of their position, and by ensuring that others are politely challenged when there is any unacceptable behaviour, by anyone.

Whether all the things stated are true or not, is not the point. There is more than enough evidence that the behaviour is toxic, destructive, time, resource and energy wasting across all interested 'players'. It is time to leave the current culture in the past, and step forward, using the energy wasted by so many people in much more positive and constructive endeavours - for the benefit of the people of Farnsfield, and the Village itself.

This is something everyone can do. Immediately. Everyone wants things to change. No one benefits from this behaviour, at least none of the people attending each meeting do. For some, the more challenging behaviour may be more ingrained than for others. That is no excuse. Every person involved is highly intelligent, professional, experienced and capable of emotional intelligence and insight. Everyone can change their behaviour, and can do so with immediate effect.

Members of the public should not be prevented, or feel pressured, to stop asking questions of public office holders. That is how democracy works. But there is no need, without concrete evidence, to accuse fellow citizens of lying or, worse, corruption. If the evidence exists, take it to the Police. In future, each resident would be best advised, when asking a question of the Parish Council, to first ask themselves 'is this question helpful ? To whom ?'.

Councillors need to act with more confidence; shutting down discussion, or ignoring legitimate questions, is a breach of the Nolan Principles and, worse, pours fuel onto the fire of the 'dodgy behaviour' theorists ! It looks, and is, weak. Not declaring an interest when taking important and expensive decisions is essential and, as any senior officer of any Council would say, it is always in your best interests, *even if the interest is only perceived*. Just do it. Failure to do so in the future will seem to be a deliberate act intended to continue the behaviours that must be put in the past.

Now is the time to act differently and support your new Clerk as she finds her feet; let her work as part of the Review to bring forward recommendations that will, if agreed and, more importantly, be **acted upon**, put an end to the vicious cycle of mistrust. Leave the past in the past; as the next section shows, we can and must learn from it, but we should not dwell on it.

The need to learn lessons from specific Issues

During the meetings with Councillors and residents, a number of issues were raised concerning the way Farnsfield Parish Council has decided things and implemented them. What follows is an understanding of a selection of those issues. It is not claimed that every 'fact' or point has been included, only that it is an attempt to piece together a narrative gleaned from, usually, several conversations. Of course, some points may have been misunderstood, initially, and that is the main reason a second meeting was held with each group in early September. Based on the discussions then, what follows represents a consensus that the Review should focus on these areas.

Nothing here is an attempt to blame anyone. Mistakes are made for a variety of reasons. The absence of continuity of Clerks is undoubtedly a main reason that things haven't always worked out - or be seen to work out - as anyone would or should expect. So, the purpose is not to point fingers. It is very much about realising that things could and should have been done differently in the past, and need to be done differently in the future.

NOTE: While these issues are recorded individually, there is clearly a lot of overlap between them.

1. A Village Plan (a Performance Management process):

The 2027 elections will provide an excellent opportunity for the Village to come together to decide what it wants its Parish Council to do, what needs to change in the Village, how and why, and what level of investment is required. The new Council can and should invest time early on discussing what

its priorities are for the coming four-year period, and consulting residents in an inclusive way on a small number of key objectives, and ways in which to achieve them. This is not a bureaucratic exercise. It is about creating a vision for the Village. Examples might include:

Farnsfield will be...a place where young people thrive and take part in sport....The Parish Council will promote road safety, traffic calming...Farnsfield will be a place that looks after the elderly....and so on

These examples are simply to illustrate the type of strategic thinking needed. What is most important, and what can the Parish Council contribute ? It is about building a consensus, working through difficult issues to find compromise where necessary, or a clear decision where it is not. It should be a framework to generate a work plan for decision making (by Councillors) and implementation by the Clerk (and volunteers). Moreover, it should be a basis for developing transparent criteria for funding specific projects - seeing which projects best deliver the agreed objectives.

None of this exists at the moment. Yet the infrastructure to support it, does. The Council already consults with the public (though this needs to be reinforced somewhat), so a consensus approach can be achieved. The full Council is empowered to make the (tough) decisions on which projects should be given a provisional go ahead. The (Sub)Committee structure is there to facilitate detailed planning, invite proposals from local agencies, and test these (do they meet the criteria set, which meets them best, can they be delivered on time, in budget etc). They can consult more widely, involve volunteers, engage with third parties (such as NSDC, civil society etc). Committees can make final recommendations to full Council, for a final decision to commit. And the Committees can monitor the progress of individual projects, make adjustments as required and evaluate outcomes.

An important element of this suggested way forward is to recognise that it is **not** the Council's role to approach, say, a sports club and simply offer them money for a project of the Clubs choosing. This is what seems to have happened with something like £140,000 of S106 monies, which has led to accusations of cronyism and corruption. Failing to declare interests then compounds the problem. It doesn't look like the Council has 'got a plan' that is shared by everyone, which includes at least broad criteria to explain why 'this' project is the best option/investment that will achieve the Council's objectives. Rather, the onus should be placed on the direct beneficiaries of funding to demonstrate how they intend to deliver the Council's objectives.

As things stand, it is easy for reasonable people to perceive Councillors acting individually, with a pre-conceived way of helping out a club of which the Councillor is a member, with no evidence seen or given that explains the value of this expenditure to the whole Village. Currently, what may be perfectly sound and useful projects, have been made to seem anything but. Rather, it is perceived as public investment in private members clubs, with no assessment of its value to the whole community.

It won't take much extra effort to adopt a more transparent approach, especially where large sums of public money are involved. There is an initial investment in time and resource needed, but the work described, especially in the section about the role of (Sub) Committees, is an investment in making projects much more successful and giving confidence that the Council has strong governance, in stark contrast to the impression it gives now.

Some work will also be needed to translate these ideas into the Council's Standing Orders etc. This will only happen if there is Council agreement to proceed in this manner.

2. Roles and Relationships

It needs to be much clearer to all about who does what, why, when and how. Let us start with the single most important issue.

Currently, **Councillors** have a very mixed understanding of their role in relation to the duties and responsibilities of the **Clerk**. It is frustrating to some Councillors that they can not be more hands-on, since they can see that things would get done much more quickly if only they were allowed to do what they want. This is an exaggeration, but only a little !

The Clerk can not have 10 line managers. Nobody can. This needs to be clarified as a matter of urgency, and Councillors must adhere to an approach that does not overwhelm the Clerk. Typically, in most public bodies, the Clerk will agree a work programme with a designated lead Councillor (perhaps the Chair of Council, possibly in consultation with other Committee chairs?). If Members are unhappy that something has/has not been done by the Clerk, they should take it up with the designated lead, not the Clerk. This is a 'must-do'; the Council is an employer and has a duty of care to its employees. Putting in place an agreed 'management' process is essential, and long overdue.

There are many other questions to be addressed about the role of Councillors in relationship to many others, briefly:

- * The public - this is a multi-layered relationship. Clearly, not all residents are voters, but those with a vote are usually identified by politicians as being quite important ! But so are those without a vote - young people, businesses, contractors, civil society and so on. All of these relationships should be conducted in line with the Nolan Principles of, especially, integrity, objectivity, accountability, openness, honesty and leadership. This must be the case at all times, even in the face of sometimes unpleasant behaviour in return. A review of how the public are consulted, how they can exercise their right to question the Council and, more widely, how they can be involved in volunteering for the parish, is required.

- * Clubs and Societies in the Parish. These provide a lot of the energy that makes living in Farnsfield so pleasant and rewarding. It is not surprising that Councillors will be active participants in such activities, and indeed, this should be welcomed. It is a valuable means by which Councillors can keep their ear to the ground, and find out what people really think. However, Councillors must always be mindful that, first and foremost, they are public office holders and need to be seen to engage fairly and equably with all aspects of Farnsfield civil society. They should be especially conscious of the temptation to help who you know more than who you don't. That is one of the reasons it is important always to declare any (perceived) interest, and to then act accordingly in more formal settings such as Committee and Full Council. If in doubt, consult the Clerk - and follow her advice. Reputational damage is easily incurred, and hard to repair.

- * Conduct in Committees and full Council, role of Chair(s). There isn't a clear sense that the Council has an understood way of reaching decisions informally and, where necessary, recording this formally. In most public bodies, there is a system of *primus inter pares*, where the chair is regarded as the 'leader' until formal discussions can be had and minuted. For example, if there is an urgent matter to be dealt with, the chair might undertake a quick round of consultations, if possible, and make a decision to, say, provide emergency funding to have a fallen tree removed from a public area. This would be an exception, and the chair would normally immediately report the issue to the Clerk and it would appear on the next appropriate agenda, for a formal decision (though sometimes this would be a rubber-stamp, only, and it is expected that Councillors would support the chair's actions). Otherwise, all decisions need to be captured in a minute before action is taken. Once agreed, even if only by a majority vote, all Councillors are bound by that decision, and must not ignore or unpick it, unless by seeking to overturn it at full Council or in subsequent Committee cycles. Of course, there are other ways of achieving decisions efficiently, and these can be explored as part of the Review.

- * Financial matters, including authority over purchases, procurement, interaction with contractors, suppliers etc, and payments, must (additionally to the previous point above) only take place in accordance with the agreed financial regulations, which will be reviewed in the next stage of this work.

- * Access to data. It is understood that some Councillors have access to data systems, such as the website. This approach needs to be reviewed. On a wider note, Councillors must understand that they do not have an automatic right to all data. Some, personnel data, for example, should be only shared with a small number of relevant Councillors (the designated lead Councillor being the initial arbiter of this) as *de facto* line manager of the Clerk. The Clerk alone would have access to data about other employees and would only need to share this in specific circumstances. Likewise, financial data needs to be shared but on a proportionate basis. Further work is needed on determining what this means,

including whether 'read-only' access is allowed. This might be an area where Councillors might be best advised to be careful what they wish for.

- * A key role for Councillors is in relation to policy initiation and making, project initiation, appraisal and prioritisation, and performance management and outcome evaluation, much of which is covered above

- * Similarly, a key role as a corollary to policy making, the role of Councillors in budget setting and prioritisation of resources needs to take place in partnership with the Clerk. In most organisations, the Clerk will manage an iterative process of developing an annual budget for the Council to consider and agree/amend. How this will be done will form part of the Review

- * Training and induction is vital, not just for new Councillors, and it needs to be taken seriously. Whatever experience is gained in life and through work, the role of a Councillor is unique, and its duties and responsibilities are not always obvious and may sometimes even appear to conflict with ordinary, common sense. But it is a role governed by statute and can not be undertaken without proper training and support.

Further work is required to ensure the principles discussed above are translated into relevant rules etc, if they are not already clear, and training is clearly needed to ensure all Councillors understand them and know how to adhere to them.

Similar work will also be carried out to ensure the following are explicitly understood:

Role of the Clerk/RFO:

- * As Principal adviser to the Council, Chairs and individual Councillors, and to identify training and other support to enable Councillors to fulfil their roles generally, and when involved in specific tasks such as recruitment

- * As the Responsible Financial Officer

- * As a point of contact for residents, clubs and societies in the Parish

- * Responsibility for information management and core documentation (eg: AGAR)

- * In relation to marketing and communications, information sharing within and outside the Council (including social media, website etc)

- * in relation to other Councils

- * in relation to suppliers and contractors

- * as line manager of staff

Role of Residents:

- * rights and responsibilities

- * behaviour towards Councillors, Council staff and each other

- * consultation and input into policy, and volunteering support

All of the above issues will be addressed during the Review of the relevant policies and procedures.

Mediation

However, the current state of many of these relationships suggests that there is a real need for some form of mediation between (at least, some) of the main protagonists. This isn't something to be treated as a 'tick box' exercise. The point about putting the past behind everyone needs to be taken

seriously. Some people have already made clear their doubts that any form of mediation can work in Farnsfield; the divisions are so complex and significant, they can not be repaired. It is clear, any form of mediation prior to the May, 2027 elections, could be wasted given that the outcome might lead to a very different group of people being elected. Or not. But waiting until after May minimises the risk of a wasted investment. The Review will consider the options and approaches that might be adopted.

There is no doubt that Councillors feel, with justification, that they are being bombarded by complaints, questions, trivia, and worse, but, in public life, it is best to follow the Nolan principles of integrity, objectivity, accountability, openness, honesty and leadership. Rather than spending time and energy determining which email has 'contravened' the Vexatious policy, and to what degree, just answer the question the first time of asking. If the conversation descends into blame and unfair criticism, politely draw it to a close and make clear that abuse will not be tolerated and that the subject is closed and no further correspondence or discussion will take place. The Clerk might be best placed to deal with most queries, which can be further examined as part of the Review.

The Vexatious policy as a whole needs to be re-examined as part of the Review; as an act of good faith, the Parish council could perhaps suspend its use for a period of, say, six months.

3. Finances

General Financial systems, including budget creation/monitoring, and payments authorisation

Perhaps the most worrying aspect of the Council's finances is that the newly-incumbent Clerk has not been able to identify an annual budget, and is therefore unable to marry up spending records with authorisations for payments. No (public) organisation can function in this manner, and it exposes Councillors to all sorts of perils. This must be addressed as urgently as possible, and certainly in time before the Council has to set its next Precept early in 2027.

There are many examples of inappropriate (spending) decisions over recent years, too many to list here, but taken as a whole, it is clear the Review needs to focus on the whole financial management, procurement and payment process.

Examples include:

- * a Councillor paying £350 to power wash the tennis courts without any previous Council decision, and having it signed off by another Councillor (surprisingly, no declaration of interest were involved)
- * a decision to pay almost £5,000 to fit a door to the football club pavilion (it isn't clear if the Council was involved in the decision, but it paid the bill without querying the expense)
- * the 2023 draft accounts contained a £32,000 error
- * an AV projector installed in the Village Hall costing around £10,000, when similar alternatives were available at much lower costs
- * the decision to charge two sports clubs peppercorn rents, but not to do so for all clubs. It is not that the decision is wrong, *per se*. Councils everywhere make decisions which impact different organisations differently. It is the opacity of the decision or the lack of reasonable criteria that is a problem
- * The issuing (by whom ? on what authority ?) of a Council Credit Card to a Councillor
- * failure to publish full accounts over the last several years

The most tangible consequence of this type of mismanagement has been a considerable increase in external audit fees from the low £000s to closer to £18,000.

Access Road

A specific issue emerged during this initial phase concerning the proposal to build a road to allow a different access to the football pitches. This may well be an example that encapsulates many of the problems observed regarding S106 funds (see below), and it is not necessary to repeat these concerns here. However, outwith this Review, there is real concern about (possibly even the legality of) how this proposal was taken forward, and by whom. Further investigation is highly recommended.

External funds - S106 and Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL)

While the overall financial management of the Parish Council has already been covered, because of the scale of external funding that the Council has received in the past, and may do in the future, it is recommended that the Review look specifically at how major projects are performance managed, both financially and 'on the ground', from inception to delivery.

S106 and CIL funds are payments from developers intended to off-set the "disbenefits" of some significant development projects, typically, new housing estates. The sums involved are negotiated with the developer, usually by the principal planning authority. In the case of two developments in Farnsfield, negotiations were led by NSDC, resulting in a combined sum of around £140,000. As part of the negotiation, the developers have a say in the type of projects that can be supported with 'their' money. For S106 monies, only capital (building) projects can be funded. CIL is more flexible and can be used for both capital and revenue (day to day funding) projects. A period of years (in this case 5 years) is agreed during which the money must be spent or it is returned to the developer. As is usually the case, the primary negotiator, NSDC would act as 'banker' and hold/administer the funds.

In the most recent round of funding, NSDC negotiated with the developers and agreed S106 monies could be spent on projects in support of sporting activities (tennis, cricket, football and bowls) and on the Village Hall. It isn't clear how this range of 'beneficiaries' was chosen. As NSDC does not have any assets in Farnsfield, on which it could have spent these monies, it must be assumed that Farnsfield Parish Council was consulted and suggested/agreed to the list.

The Covid pandemic occurred at the beginning of the five year period; understandably, this made progress difficult, but work started on aspects of the Village Hall refurbishment, the single most costly project. It would seem that other projects were identified by the four relevant sports clubs in the Village. It seems that they were simply asked what they would like to do. This was a missed opportunity. NSDC urged the Parish Council to ask the various sport clubs to contribute to the projects themselves, perhaps on a 25/75 split, with S106 paying the larger share. Alternatively, the Parish Council could have asked the sporting clubs to raise funds in other ways, to bring in money and make the S106 'go further'.

Neither of these approaches was adopted. In effect, it appears that private member clubs were given a 'cash gift' for a project of their choosing.

No evidence of how the projects were chosen, nor how it was decided how much money each project was to be allocated, seems to be available. Nor is there any evidence that there was any robust planning or any risk assessment of each project's viability. It appears that each club was required to obtain three quotes for work, though the tennis club only obtained two, stating it had sought more but only two quotes were received. That can happen, though a resident claims they sent out the same specification of works and obtained further, lower quotes. These were not taken forward.

After the Parish elections in 2023, as work had not (fully) started on the club projects, the new Council decided to revisit the allocations and specifications, and decided, among other things, to switch funds from the football club to the tennis club. No one can explain the rationale for this, but it may be that as the second most expensive project, with time running out, the Council decided the best option was to give money to a club that could spend it in time. Other explanations have been suggested.

At some point in, or after, 2023, NSDC decided to devolve the S106 monies to Farnsfield Parish Council. While the official decision for this was taken by the NSDC Cabinet, it appears that the initial

suggestion came from the (newly elected) Parish Council. The logic for this, it seems, is that, with time running out, it would be simpler for Farnsfield to manage the funds and make payments direct to the sport clubs. This is a very odd decision, not least because NSDC were benefiting from the interest being earned on the monies in their bank account, and had considerably more resources to manage the sums involved than Farnsfield. There was no risk assessment of this decision. No attempt to understand whether Farnsfield was capable of managing such large amounts. And no significant benefit to the clubs involved since they could have dealt direct with NSDC just as easily, and quite possibly more quickly. So, what was the benefit or advantage of moving the money to the Parish?

The road to hell is paved with good intentions ! Farnsfield did not have the financial systems in place to keep a track of expenditure (or if it did, it did not use them). When it came to examining the expenditures made, in order to calculate whether the developers were to be repaid, over £11,000 could not be accounted for. That is not to say the money wasn't paid by Farnsfield to the various clubs, (as much as £9,000 of the £11,000 was actually spent, as a resident has subsequently demonstrated, but no one in Farnsfield or NSDC has acknowledged this, to date, despite being told by the resident). Because it could not be accounted for, Farnsfield has had to pay back the full sum (plus other monies relating to CIL and for interest). Also, Farnsfield, by paying the clubs directly, has not been able to reclaim VAT that was part of the payments to contractors. Had Farnsfield paid the contractors directly, VAT could have been reclaimed. NSDC would have done this automatically.

The Council must learn lessons from this episode, as indeed must NSDC. Unfortunately, none of the errors made to date can now be corrected.

4. Information Management, Access to Online Admin etc

The Council does not appear to have an adequate grip on its digital platforms or a clear understanding of the rules of confidentiality, including GDPR.

There has been an example of an email marked 'strictly confidential' being shared with all Councillors when the original email concerned a complaint against a single Councillor. Freedom of Information requests have revealed derogatory, some might say misogynistic, comments in other emails using Council email addresses. And there seems to have been a deliberate deletion of CCTV footage which had been requested to be preserved.

These are all relatively small examples of, at best, incompetence in a digital world, but clearly the rules around use and misuse of Council systems need to be tightened up, and further training needs to be available for those with a legitimate reason for accessing these systems.

More concerning is the deletion of swathes of public documents from the Council online administration records, alleged by the then Clerk to have been done by a single Councillor. The volume of documentation removed suggests this was not an accident. Advice has been sought from the NSDC Monitoring Officer on the legal implications of this action, both in terms of the consequences for the Council (with seemingly no back up to public records that must be kept for 7 years, or longer in some cases) and for the individual allegedly responsible. Whatever the advice that is given, the rules around information systems, especially, access, need to be revisited as part of the Review.

Next Steps

The various meetings of individuals and groups, Councillors and residents in Farnsfield appeared to support the inter-locking recommended areas on which the Review should now focus. The supporting evidence shows these are serious issues all of which contribute significantly to the Parish Council being dysfunctional.

However, what is crystal clear now is that, unless all 'sides' not only agree to put the past behind them and to **act** in a civil manner to all other interested parties, then the chances of a Review of rules, procedures etc actually enabling the Parish Council to function much more effectively will be very

limited. It must follow that, to continue with the Review without agreement to change behaviours, would be a poor investment of time and money.

Finally, it is recommended that this Summary Note be shared with all those who participated in the initial two rounds of meetings.

Note: For the next phase of the Review, current documentation (if it exists), will be necessary, including:

- * Internal and External Audit reports for the last two years
- * Key Council documents/policies, such as the Scheme of Delegations (Financial and policy/decision-making), Standing Orders/Constitution, local Code of Conduct, AGAR, budget making process, most recent accounts, public consultation processes/rules (including questions at Council meetings).

**William Bradshaw,
September/October, 2026**

Addendum

The Parish Council *resolved* on the 22nd September that all Councillors should be have a Right of Reply to the Note above. It further *resolved* that any responses should be published, in full, alongside this Note.

Five Councillors, and one member of the public, made comment. Four of these Councillors comments are included below. It is not for me to comment on these; they are the views of individual Councillors.

A fifth, Councillor Maurice Shakeshaft, sent multiple emails covering a range of topics. As the deadline for comments approached, he sent a final email making it clear that he did not wish any of his comments to be made public, so they are not included here. In one of the emails sent, Councillor Shakeshaft copied in a member of the public, a former Councillor, who had not played any role in the initial round of meetings. The inclusion of a member of the public who had not previously been involved in the initial stages of the Review is a clear breach of confidentiality (as well as a Data breach, since it included personal details, permission for the use of which was neither sought nor given), so the sixth response from a member of the public has been ignored, and is not included here.

Right of Reply

1. Councillor Joyce Shakeshaft

25th September, 2026
Good morning Will

Please find enclosed my comments on the governance report. I could have written much more, but have tried to focus on a couple of items which I feel do not represent the true state of affairs.

I am particularly upset and troubled by the information included about our longstanding visits to the local pub. As I emphasised when we met, there is never any discussion of council business. To suggest otherwise, is potentially slanderous and threatens our reputation as councillors and also as residents. I would ask that this paragraph be removed or severely modified, particularly as no consideration is given to the effect of poor behaviour and false accusations on those councillors involved, plus their friends.

Lastly, I think the use of the word "dysfunctional" on several occasions is inappropriate, particularly due to the lack of background information from previous clerks to the council. Was an attempt made to contact previous clerks? It wouldn't be surprising if they declined to be involved! However, this leaves a large hole in the report, in terms of the history of the council in recent years.

Should you wish to discuss this issue, please contact me.

Kind regards
Joyce

Attachment

Response to Report Summary

1. Farnsfield Parish Council's broad sense of direction is to provide facilities and services for residents – and therefore the phrase “without any sense of direction” is completely inappropriate. Despite the lack of continuity, as a result of the high turnover of clerks and, to some extent, councillors, FPC has always tried to work for the interests of residents.

2. Below is the paragraph relating to a group of friends, some of whom are councillors, that have been meeting together for 20+ year in the Plough on Sunday evening. To have our integrity challenged in a

document that is for public consumption is totally unacceptable. As was stated in our conversation, we DO NOT discuss council business! The fact that we have been harassed and photographed whilst trying to meet as friends is also totally unacceptable and is not even mentioned. It is also insulting to our friends, who are not councillors, to suggest that they would put us in an awkward position with regard to council activities.

"There are, very worryingly, persistent reports of a Councillor-led 'caucus', involving serving and former Councillors and members of the public, which meets regularly. This alleged caucus has earned the name 'Plough Sunday'. Only the participants in these alleged meetings can say what is discussed. One Councillor, who attends these gatherings, categorically denied that any Council business was ever discussed among this long-standing group of friends. In the current climate, however, given the commonalities of 'attendees', it is not surprising that some residents believe 'Plough Sunday' is a primary driver of Parish Council policy and decision-making. The NSDC Monitoring Officer is investigating this matter, though it is unlikely to prove anything beyond one person's version of events versus another's speculation."

3. In relation to the paragraph below, no one club benefitted more than any other from S106 spending. The council was very careful to ensure that those who were overseeing the spend for individual clubs had no link with that particular club whatsoever, in the interests of transparency. Councillors who were members of a club did declare an interest and accordingly, did not vote in that particular instance.

"Despite advice on several occasions to declare an interest in key decisions, some Councillors have behaved in a manner that has encouraged an impression that they were exercising favouritism for certain clubs, acting in a self-serving manner regarding funding bids/allocations, or at least being unwilling to provide the criteria used to support those decisions."

2. Councillor Lesley Healy

28th September, 2026

Good Morning William

Thank you for providing the Review of Governance Report Summary though I note that your recommendation was to share it with all those who participated in the initial 2 rounds of meetings. You will possibly be aware that the Report was an agenda item at our Full council meeting on the 22nd September and a resolution was passed to allow councillors to give feedback within 10 days. I am disappointed that positive initiatives didn't get a mention by the participants such as Tackling Loneliness and the resulting friendly spaces, the Newsletter and the Youth Council. I note that in your opening paragraph you state "Not everyone will agree with every detail" so I will briefly state a few of my concerns.

Overarching Picture

The accusation of the 'existence of a Councillor led 'caucus' and 'commonality of attendees' -

Response - We have been friends for over 30 years. It would be entirely inappropriate to discuss council business and spoil the evening whether it's on a Saturday or Sunday.

Finances

Examples of Inappropriate Spending

Spending decision to power wash the tennis courts.

Response - Are you referring to the Mini Tennis Court (singular) on Lady Goodwin Corner which is a Parish Council Asset and its maintenance outlined in our Play and Green Space Policy?

The AV projector.

Response - This was well researched before it came to council for a decision. Details of various projectors within a range of prices were examined to suit the constraints within the hall. I do recall a member of the public raising his concerns with us that we should install a television screen as a

cheaper option but this was discounted on the grounds that the Lower Hall is hired out to a range of groups where physical activities take place and it would be a safety concern and the need to update software in future. In fact the type of projector was determined by the movement of the ceiling due to the heavy footfall on the floor above and the light from the windows

The cost of £10,000 is misleading as it drops to £8,300 before VAT and £2,300 was awarded (after a grant application) to the Farnsfield Trust. All Community groups can use the projector free of charge a specific requirement. Of the grant, the Barco Dongle was also purchased to overcome wi-fi issues within The Hall.

External Funds-S106 and CIL

Reclaiming VAT

It has been my understanding that Parish Councils cannot purchase equipment for other groups in order to avoid VAT.

I fully support your view that what matters is what we do next for the village

Regards

Lesley

3. Councillor Corinne Moore

30th September, 2026

Good morning Will,

Thank you for the Review of Governance Report Summary which I found very interesting.

As you know, there are problems here and, as a member of the Staffing Committee, I am really hoping that our 8th Clerk will remain with us.

I have made a few comments on particular areas I felt strongly about or noted. There were more - especially in relation to finances and S106, but I don't have the time to unpick going back 3 years of Minutes and notes just now.

Best wishes,
Corinne

Attachment

Right to Reply Comments

“.....A few weeks after these initial meetings, each initial participant was invited to a further meeting, where they were provided with an overview of the emerging themes, and the themes/issues that seemed generally to require more detailed review. This Summary note has been amended to try to reflect the views expressed at this subsequent meeting.....”

Response: Unfortunately, the meeting I attended was effectively ‘hi-jacked’ by a Councillor using that opportunity to challenge the Clerk in relation to her work on finances. I don’t feel I got the verbal feedback in relation to the comments of the residents that I am aware other Councillors had. It was embarrassing and clearly difficult for our Clerk. I feel she (the Councillor) should have been firmly reminded of the purpose of the meeting

“.....Furthermore, there are incredibly poor, almost non-existent, financial systems; some evidence to suggest, at best, a cavalier attitude by some Councillors to pay due regard to minuted decisions, or even to act without a minuted decision to authorise such actions; there is no evidence whatsoever of performance management of projects, policies or procedures; or, until recent weeks, any robust and

effective communications between Councillors and the Clerk(s). Some Councillors seem to ignore the professional advice offered by the Clerk or they do not understand what their role is in relation to the Office.....”

Response: As someone who has led on two projects I am unhappy about the comment ‘no evidence of performance management of projects....’ Both projects ‘Tackling Loneliness in the community’ and ‘Village Centre Security and lone working...’ were minuted and had positive outcomes. Or perhaps you didn’t mean that?

“Plough Sunday..There are, very worryingly, persistent reports of a Councillor-led ‘caucus’, involving serving and former Councillors and members of the public, which meets regularly. This alleged caucus has earned the name ‘Plough Sunday’. Only the participants in these alleged meetings can say what is discussed. One Councillor, who attends these gatherings, categorically denied that any Council business was ever discussed among this long-standing group of friends. In the current climate, however, given the commonalities of ‘attendees’, it is not surprising that some residents believe ‘Plough Sunday’ is a primary driver of Parish Council policy and decision-making. The NSDC Monitoring Officer is investigating this matter, though it is unlikely to prove anything beyond one person’s version of events versus another’s.”

Response: Speculation....

I am very unhappy about this. There were 2 of us Cllrs who talked about this. This is a small group of friends some of whom are Cllrs who have known each other for years and socialize including some Sunday evening drinks at The Plough. There are couples who are nothing to do with the Council and I was told when I was asked for a Sunday evening drink a few months ago, that Council business is NOT discussed. I have been a few times and last week for a Birthday of one of the other couples. I gather that a resident also there took a pic of the group and posted it as ? proof of the caucus at Plough Sunday. It is easy to say ‘go somewhere else’ if this is the perception of this group of residents. But why should they? Some people walk to the pub – it is our local! It is warm and welcoming unlike the nearest local pub outside the village which would mean using people’s cars.

“S106 No evidence of how the projects were chosen, nor how it was decided how much money each project was to be allocated, seems to be available. Nor is there any evidence that there was any robust planning or any risk assessment of each projects viability. It appears that each club was required to obtain three quotes for work, though the tennis club only obtained two, stating it had sought more but only two quotes were received. That can happen, though a resident claims they sent out the same specification of works and obtained further, lower quotes. These were not taken forward.”

Response: There was a 106 group set up in 2023 – so there was evidence of the Sports Clubs involved, and the Village Centre works carried out.

“Finances Examples include:

* a Councillor paying £350 to power wash the tennis courts without any previous Council decision, and having it signed off by another Councillor (surprisingly, no declaration of interest were involved) I have no recollection of this at all. It may be historical. It would have been helpful to have the Minute or payment info.

* a decision to pay almost £5,000 to fit a door to the football club pavilion (it isn’t clear if the Council was involved in the decision, but it paid the bill without querying the expense)”

Response: Again it would have been helpful to have the Minute reference for this.

Corinne Moore

4. Councillor Rachel Parkin

6th October, 2026

Good afternoon Will,

I hope your well and enjoying this last bit of summer ish weather!

First of all, can I thank you again for your hard work and time put into the drafting of your report. It was lovely to meet with you and I'm glad to hear you enjoyed your time in the village.

I attach my right to reply document. I want to explain a little about its contents and my reasons behind it. I think your report is good and understand that it was the first part of the process, however there is no way councillors will vote to spend any more money on this review so I know if I don't speak up now, I'll have no other opportunity to do so. I've also seen and heard some of the ridiculous "excuses" coming from other councillors.

Councillors who failed to take part in the process proposed this madness of a right to reply and clearly didn't understand what they were voting for.

Thank you for your concerns around my well-being. I feel if I don't speak up now I never will!

Thank you once again.

Rachel

Attachment

I welcome the opportunity to respond to the Governance Review and, in particular, to provide context to some of the matters discussed within it.

I agree with many of the review's conclusions. However, I believe it is important that the scale and nature of the evidence I provided during the review is properly understood.

I did not simply provide allegations, opinions or recollections. I supplied more than 240 pages of supporting material, including emails, Council documents, screenshots, correspondence and other contemporaneous evidence. In a number of instances, I also hold recordings of Council meetings. My purpose in providing that evidence was not to attack individual Councillors or former members of staff. It was to demonstrate what I believe has been a longstanding pattern of weak governance, inappropriate behaviour, poor information management and decisions being made without sufficiently transparent authority.

Treatment of Residents and Public Inspection of the Accounts

Among the evidence I supplied were emails demonstrating what I considered inappropriate comments about residents, particularly in connection with residents exercising their statutory rights to inspect the Council's accounts.

A small group of Councillors sought advice from NALC about the extent of the residents' inspection rights and whether those rights could be restricted. The residents subsequently challenged the information they were then given by the Council, stating that the advice being attributed to NALC did not correctly reflect their statutory inspection rights.

It was at this stage that the actual NALC advice was circulated more widely to Councillors. For some Councillors, including myself, this was the first time we had seen that advice.

What concerned me was that the written NALC advice did not support the restrictions that had been communicated to the residents. On the contrary, the NALC guidance set out the applicable inspection requirements and, in substance, reflected the process the residents had been seeking to exercise. This raises an important governance question. If professional advice is sought by the Council, that advice should be accurately represented and followed. It should not be selectively interpreted or disregarded simply because its conclusion is inconvenient.

There were also inappropriate comments in an email exchange between councillors in relation to one of the Residents who wanted to come in and view the accounts.

“the MoP's equivalent of the 'water torture'. Less vigorous than water boarding. Do we tolerate torture?”

Taken together, I believe these matters raise legitimate questions about whether attempts were being made to restrict scrutiny; whether professional advice was accurately communicated; whether Councillors were being provided with the complete information necessary to exercise proper oversight.

For me, it is also another example of a wider concern running throughout the evidence I submitted to the Governance Review: professional advice was sought, but when that advice did not support the course certain individuals apparently wished to pursue, the Council did not always appear to follow it. That is particularly serious when members of the public are seeking to scrutinise how public money has been spent.

Deletion of Council Information

I also provided evidence concerning the deletion of material from the Council's website.

The Councillor concerned subsequently confirmed by email to other Councillors that they had carried out the deletion.

“let's talk about this and prepare for public engagement.”

My interpretation at the time was that this appeared to suggest a need to agree how the matter would be explained publicly - effectively, as I perceived it, to 'get our story straight'. I appreciate that others may interpret that phrase differently. That is why I supplied the underlying correspondence rather than simply asking the reviewer to accept my interpretation of it.

The significance of the deletion is increased by the subsequent difficulties the Council has experienced reconstructing its financial records.

Decisions and Discussions Outside Formal Meetings

The Governance Review refers to what has become known as 'Plough Sunday'. I believe I can provide useful first-hand context.

Approximately one month after joining the Council, I was invited to one of these gatherings.

Ostensibly it related to a Councillor's birthday. However, almost the entire conversation concerned Council business.

I was given a very detailed account of the vexatious residents, the circumstances surrounding the election of the current Council and plans for forthcoming Council projects. Council business dominated the evening to such an extent that my daughter eventually left because she was tired of hearing about the Council.

Approximately two weeks later I was invited to another gathering, this time at a Councillor's home. At that gathering, Councillors discussed who should become Chair of the Council approximately two months later.

I have not attended such gatherings since because I became concerned about Council business being discussed outside the Council's formal decision-making processes.

On the very evening I received the Governance Review, as I was sitting reading it, a resident sent me a photograph showing a number of current and former Councillors sitting together in the pub.

The issue is not that Councillors are prohibited from being friends or socialising. Of course they are not. My concern arises when gatherings described as social occasions become forums in which substantive Council business, future projects or future Council positions are discussed away from the public decision-making process.

There is lots of evidence that discussions have taken place outside formal Council meetings.

There have been occasions when projects have been discussed at Council meetings as though they had already been agreed or developed, despite there being no documented evidence that I could identify showing where the Council had previously discussed or authorised them.

Examples include proposals concerning a second football pitch on the Acres playing field and the access road.

Another example was a Councillor's 'Ninja Park' project, which arrived at Full Council already substantially developed and quoted, despite my being unable to identify an earlier Council decision

giving the appropriate delegated authority for that work to have progressed to that stage. That project was actually passed off as a Youth Council project, but at that time I was involved in the Youth Council and it had never been discussed in over 13 months of meetings.

My concern is not necessarily with the merits of those projects. It is with the process.

Residents should be able to follow the decision-making trail: Who proposed something? When was it discussed? What authority was given? Who was authorised to obtain quotations or progress the project? If that trail does not exist in the public record, legitimate questions arise about where those decisions and discussions actually took place.

Social Media Conduct

I also supplied the reviewer with evidence of social-media comments made by a serving Councillor which I considered wholly inappropriate.

“Folk prefer the traditional homogeneous community rather than a multicultural one!”

When challenged about what was meant by a 'traditional homogeneous community', the Councillor subsequently described such a community as being characterised by:

“a shared language, ethnicity and cultural practices.”

I considered those comments particularly concerning from an elected representative. I am deliberately setting out what was actually written rather than applying a definitive label to the Councillor or attempting to determine their motivation.

Funnily enough these comments were removed in the week leading up to the Governance review, but I had already been sent a copy by a concerned resident.

Handling of an Anonymous Hate Letter and Concerns for My Safety

In August 2025, an anonymous and highly distressing letter concerning me and my family was posted through the letterbox at the Village Centre.

The letter contained a photograph of me and members of my family, together with a social-media post relating to my campaigning work. Written across it were a series of hostile allegations and comments about me and my family. The letter warned people to “beware” of me and accused me, amongst other things, of bullying a family and ruining people's lives.

What concerns me just as much as the contents of the letter is the way the Council handled it after receiving it.

The letter came into the possession of the then Clerk and Chair, yet I was not informed of its existence for more than ten days.

This was not an insignificant piece of correspondence. It was an anonymous communication containing my photograph, information about my family and hostile allegations about me, which had been physically delivered to a Council building in the village where I live.

Councillors were aware that I am a survivor of domestic abuse. Against that background, I believe an anonymous communication of this nature should have been brought to my attention immediately so that I could make my own assessment of any potential risk to myself and my family and, if necessary, contact the police and take appropriate precautions.

The Council could not have known during those ten days who had delivered it, why they had delivered it, whether the person knew where I lived, or whether the communication represented any wider risk.

Fortunately, subsequent investigation indicated that the circumstances were not what they had initially appeared to be. The matter appeared to relate to a previous occupant of my home rather than somebody connected with my own past.

My understanding following my contact with the police was that the suspected person responsible was connected to that former occupant and had been established as being present at a meeting at the Village Centre on the evening the letter was delivered.

The important point is that none of that was known when the letter was first received.

There is another aspect of the incident which caused me considerable concern.

I subsequently became aware that the letter had not simply been secured and brought directly to my attention. The then Clerk disclosed in conversation that she had left it on her desk and referred to a

Councillor having commented upon it. This led me to understand that at least one other Councillor had seen or was aware of the letter before I had been told about it. I later had a conversation with that Councillor who is aware of my home situation, who made out they had no knowledge of the letter and acted as though they were appalled by it.

I found that extremely troubling.

My concern is that an anonymous and potentially threatening communication concerning a serving Councillor and her family appears to have been accessible to or discussed by others while the person actually targeted by it remained unaware of its existence for more than ten days.

For me, this raises questions about judgement, confidentiality and, most importantly, duty of care and personal safety.

The fact that the matter ultimately proved to have an explanation connected with a former occupant of my home does not retrospectively make the decision to withhold the letter from me acceptable.

The people holding it could not have known that explanation at the time.

Had the letter instead originated from somebody connected with my own history of domestic abuse, those ten days could have mattered enormously.

My point is different. Had I been informed promptly when the letter was received, I could have dealt with the matter immediately, sought police advice and made informed decisions about my own safety and wellbeing.

Instead, the letter was apparently known about within the Council for more than ten days before I was told. I now have to continue performing a very public role while regularly being in the same room as someone whom I understand was connected to the circumstances surrounding an anonymous hostile communication concerning me and my family. I do not suggest that this establishes that the person was responsible for producing or delivering the letter.

That continuing impact is one of the reasons why I do not regard the Council's handling of the incident as a minor administrative error.

I therefore believe this incident should form part of the wider consideration of how I have been treated during my time as a Councillor. Whatever disagreements existed within the Council, I should have been told promptly that an anonymous hostile communication concerning me and my family had been physically delivered to Council premises.

My personal safety and the safety of my family should never have been secondary to Council politics, internal discussions or somebody else's judgement about whether I needed to know.

[New Councillors, Committee Roles and the Breakdown in Working Relationships](#)

When three new Councillors joined the Council, I initially regarded their arrival with genuine optimism. After a difficult period for Farnsfield Parish Council, I hoped that new members would bring fresh perspectives and help us move beyond some of the divisions of the past.

Those Councillors initially supported me and, indeed, helped me to become Chair of the Council. I therefore think it is important to make clear that my subsequent concerns about their conduct did not arise because they had opposed me or because there was hostility between us from the outset. Quite the opposite.

The relationship began to deteriorate when questions arose about what Councillors and committee chairs were permitted to do. I was regularly asked for advice and, where I could, I provided it. However, I increasingly found that where my understanding of the Council's Standing Orders, Financial Regulations or wider legal framework did not support what certain Councillors wanted to do, my advice was not welcomed.

My experience increasingly became one of: if the rules do not allow us to do something, find a way of changing the rules. That concerned me because a Parish Council cannot simply rewrite its own procedures to circumvent statutory requirements or confer powers upon individual Councillors that the Council does not possess. There is an important distinction between rules which the Council may lawfully amend and legal requirements with which it must comply.

Over time, I found myself increasingly excluded from discussions. At the same time, I began receiving persistent and, in my experience, increasingly aggressive email correspondence, sometimes at inappropriate hours. What had initially felt like an opportunity for a fresh start became another

source of conflict when I would not support actions which I believed were procedurally or legally inappropriate.

I do not suggest that all three Councillors behaved identically or bear equal responsibility. However, I believe the change in that relationship is important context when considering the subsequent email traffic, exclusion and conduct described elsewhere in this response.

On a personal level, I am genuinely saddened by the breakdown in my relationship with one of those Councillors in particular.

When he first joined the Council, I believed we had developed a positive and constructive working relationship. I respected him, enjoyed working with him and believed that we shared a genuine desire to improve the Council. His support for me becoming Chair was something I valued.

That is why the subsequent deterioration in our relationship has been particularly difficult.

I have formed the personal view that he has been significantly influenced by another Councillor and by the increasingly adversarial dynamic which developed within that group. I appreciate that this is my perception and that I cannot know what discussions have taken place privately or what has influenced another person's decisions. I therefore do not present that as an established fact.

One of the consequences has been that, since becoming Chair, I have not felt able to reach out to him privately to discuss many of the difficulties I have been dealing with.

Given our previous relationship, there have been numerous occasions when I would have valued being able to pick up the telephone, ask for his perspective or simply have a confidential conversation with a fellow Councillor about the pressures facing the Council.

I have not felt able to do that because I became concerned that anything I said in confidence might be relayed back to other members of the group and subsequently repeated, challenged or used against me. I want to be clear that I cannot establish that this would necessarily have happened on every occasion; the important point is that the deterioration in trust had reached the stage where I no longer felt safe taking that risk. I now believe things have become so difficult that the friendship may be unsalvageable, although I do believe he has been misled by other Councillors.

That has made the role of Chair considerably more isolating than it needed to be.

I find that particularly sad because this is someone I previously trusted and with whom I believed I had a good working relationship. There were times during an extremely difficult period for the Council when having that trusted relationship would have made a genuine difference to me.

I do not believe that every person involved in the difficulties at Farnsfield Parish Council necessarily began with the same intentions, behaved in the same way or bears the same degree of responsibility.

I also do not want this Right to Reply to erase the fact that there were positive relationships before matters deteriorated.

That distinction matters to me. This Right to Reply is not about dividing Councillors into friends and enemies. It is about identifying particular actions and behaviours which I believe have contributed to the governance problems facing the Council, while being fair about the different roles individuals have played.

I would much rather that the positive working relationship we initially had had continued. However, maintaining a relationship with another Councillor cannot require me, as Chair, to agree to something that I believe is procedurally wrong or to remain silent when I believe the Council is acting outside its proper governance arrangements.

[Understanding the Role of Committee Chairs](#)

The difficulties became more pronounced when some of the new Councillors were subsequently elected as Chairs of Council committees. A recurring area of disagreement concerned what being Chair of a committee actually authorised them to do.

My understanding, from standing orders, Committee terms of reference and training, was that election as Chair of a committee did not automatically give that Councillor executive responsibility for everything falling within the committee's remit. Nor did the title itself give an individual Councillor authority to make decisions, instruct staff, commit the Council, obtain access to systems or otherwise exercise powers which had not been specifically delegated.

Their role as Chair was principally to chair the meetings of that committee when they took place and to carry out whatever additional functions had actually been delegated through the Council's lawful governance arrangements. It appears that the terms of delegation are seriously open to

misinterpretation, and this is something the Council needs to address, especially if Councillors are refusing to undertake training.

Despite guidance being provided by me, the Clerk and other Councillors, I repeatedly encountered resistance to that distinction. In my experience, some committee Chairs appeared to regard their election as giving them a managerial or executive role over the area covered by their committee. That was particularly concerning in relation to Finance and Governance and Staffing. A Chair of Finance does not, simply by virtue of holding that title, become the RFO's line manager or acquire an automatic right to independently access financial systems or bank accounts. Similarly, a Chair of Staffing does not, simply because they chair that committee, acquire unrestricted authority to manage the Clerk or make employment decisions outside authority delegated by the Council.

Where additional authority exists, it needs to come from the Council's lawful scheme of delegation, committee terms of reference or a specific Council decision - not simply from the title 'Chair'.

This is another reason why I found the refusal or failure to engage properly with training so frustrating. These were not obscure technicalities being raised simply to obstruct newly elected Councillors. They concerned the basic governance framework within which a Parish Council operates: the distinction between the Council as the corporate decision-making body, its committees, its officers and individual elected members.

[The Solar Grant Incident](#)

One incident illustrates particularly well how this breakdown in trust affected the Council's ability to conduct relatively ordinary business.

The Council was considering a local grant application connected with a coffee morning. One Councillor strongly believed that the proposed expenditure did not satisfy the grant's terms and conditions. The issue had already generated extensive email discussion over a period of weeks. Rather than dismissing that concern, I sought clarification from the solar grant provider as to whether the proposed expenditure fell within the permitted hospitality provisions. The response arrived at approximately 4.30pm on the day of the Council meeting.

I did not see the email when it arrived. I noticed it shortly before leaving home for the meeting at approximately 5.55pm. Because there was very little time, I printed the email and took it with me so that the information could be available during the debate.

During the meeting, however, a Councillor challenged the email and alleged that the Clerk and I had deliberately withheld or hidden it from the Council. That allegation was untrue. There had been no attempt to conceal anything. The response had arrived late that afternoon and I had seen it only minutes before leaving home. My immediate response upon seeing it was to print it and bring it to the meeting.

There is also personal context which I would not ordinarily consider relevant to Council business, but which demonstrates why the allegation affected me so strongly. I had spent much of that day supporting a young person who was giving evidence to the police concerning an alleged sexual assault. I deliberately provide no further information which could identify that individual.

Against that background, the suggestion that I had spent the afternoon conspiring with the Clerk to conceal an email from Councillors was particularly upsetting. The reality was that I had been occupied with an extremely serious matter, saw the email shortly before leaving home and immediately printed it for the meeting.

More importantly, the incident demonstrated a wider problem. The Clerk had explained the position and had access to the written response from the grant provider. Yet the professional word of the Clerk, supported by the actual email from the organisation administering the grant, was still not considered sufficient by certain Councillors. Instead of the clarification resolving the question about eligibility, the discussion shifted towards an allegation that the Clerk and Chair had deliberately concealed information.

Reasonable scrutiny is essential. Assuming misconduct simply because professional advice or external clarification does not support a preferred interpretation is something very different.

What Happened Following the Meeting

The matter did not end when the meeting concluded. The following morning, the Councillor emailed me requesting a copy of the grant provider CEO's email which had been referred to at the meeting. I had no objection to the underlying information being available to Councillors.

The correspondence then moved on to questions about the financial administration of one of the grants. I was asked to explain how I intended to ensure that the correct audit process would be followed. My response was straightforward: that was a matter for the RFO.

That answer was not intended to avoid responsibility. It reflected my understanding of the respective roles within the Council. As Chair, it was not my role to take over the professional financial functions of the Responsible Financial Officer or personally devise an audit process for an individual grant. However, that explanation was not accepted.

What followed was, in my experience, an exhausting day of repeated backwards-and-forwards email correspondence. Rather than accepting that the Council employed an RFO to undertake the relevant financial and accounting functions, I felt repeatedly pressed to provide answers and assurances about matters which properly sat within the RFO's responsibilities.

The volume and tone of the correspondence continued throughout that day. It ultimately culminated in the Councillor sending me the text message: **'I think you and I may need a little face to face chat!'** The message was subsequently deleted, but I had already taken a screenshot of it.

Viewed completely in isolation, somebody might interpret those words differently. I can only explain how I experienced them in the context in which they were sent. They came at the end of a full day of persistent and increasingly difficult correspondence following a contentious Council meeting. In that context, I experienced the message as threatening and intimidating.

The issue began as a relatively straightforward question about whether a community coffee morning complied with the conditions of a grant. Clarification was obtained directly from the organisation administering that grant. The issue nevertheless developed into allegations that information had deliberately been withheld, demands for further documentation, questioning of how I personally intended to ensure the audit process was followed, a prolonged exchange of emails and, ultimately, a message which I experienced as intimidating.

Subsequent Criticism of My Communication with the Grant Provider

The matter resurfaced again a few weeks later. On the day of another Council meeting, the same Councillor emailed me criticising the way I had communicated with the CEO of the solar grant provider. In particular, she described my communication as unprofessional because I had used an emoji in one of my emails to him.

For completeness, I had used a head in hands emoji. I have no difficulty acknowledging that.

What was missing from the criticism, however, was the context. By that stage I had exchanged approximately half a dozen emails with the CEO because Councillors had been unable to agree about the interpretation of the grant conditions, particularly whether the proposed expenditure fell within the provisions concerning hospitality. I had repeatedly sought clarification directly from the organisation administering the scheme in an effort to resolve the disagreement.

The correspondence with the CEO had developed into an ordinary and cordial exchange. I do not believe that the use of a single emoji within that wider exchange affected the substance of the advice I obtained or my ability to represent the Council appropriately.

More importantly, I question why this relatively trivial issue needed to be raised in the manner and at the time that it was. The email was sent on the day of a Council meeting. In my experience, this was part of a wider pattern whereby difficult or critical correspondence would arrive on meeting days, sometimes beginning early in the day (1am) and continuing towards the meeting itself.

I experienced the email as derogatory and as an attempt to undermine my confidence shortly before I was required to Chair a public Council meeting. I recognise that I cannot establish another person's motive simply from the timing of an email. I therefore do not present that interpretation as fact.

What I can evidence is what was said, when it was sent, the history of the Solar Grant dispute which preceded it, and the wider pattern of correspondence I was receiving.

My concern is the cumulative pattern, rather than a disagreement about a single emoji.

Formal Complaint About My Chairing of a Meeting

A similar situation occurred the following day after the Council meeting, the same Councillor submitted an email formally complaining about the way I had chaired the meeting the previous evening.

Among the criticisms made was an allegation that I had failed to intervene when an exchange took place between a Councillor and a resident during the meeting.

This was a serious criticism of the way I had exercised my responsibilities as Chair. However, on this occasion there was an important piece of contemporaneous evidence available: the meeting had been recorded.

I listened to the recording. It captured the exchange in question and, importantly, it also captured me intervening and bringing that exchange to an end.

I therefore chose not to become involved in another prolonged email argument about competing recollections of what had happened. Instead, I forwarded the complaint to the Monitoring Officer together with the recording of the meeting so that the allegation could be considered against the contemporaneous evidence.

I do not object to my decisions as Chair being questioned. I expect scrutiny and I accept that I will not always get everything right. What I find much more difficult is being accused of failing to do something when a recording of the meeting appears to demonstrate that I did precisely what I was being criticised for failing to do.

This incident also needs to be viewed alongside the other examples described above: the Solar Grant dispute, the allegation that information had deliberately been withheld, the prolonged correspondence the following day, the threatening text message, and the later criticism of my communication with the grant provider on another Council meeting day.

Individually, each communication could potentially be characterised as disagreement, scrutiny or criticism. Collectively, I experienced the frequency, timing, tone and nature of the correspondence as a sustained attempt to undermine me in my role as Chair.

My Experience of Bullying and Exclusion

Since I began challenging some of the practices within the Council, I believe I have experienced behaviour that I consider bullying and intimidating. In my experience, this intensified after I became Chair.

I have also repeatedly been excluded from email chains by Councillors. In my view, exclusion can itself become a form of bullying when a Councillor is deliberately prevented from receiving information or participating in discussions relevant to their elected role.

I have also been shouted at and publicly humiliated during meetings.

During one closed session, a Councillor punched the table while referring to residents as **'that shower over there'** and pointing towards the area where residents normally sit. I hold a recording of that incident.

Attempted Reassignment of the F&E Sports and Football Role

A further example of the difficulties I experienced concerned my role as F&E Sports and Football Lead. There was a disagreement between a former Councillor and me about what that role required me personally to undertake. In particular, I did not believe it was appropriate for an individual Councillor to be ringing around obtaining quotations for contractors and materials. I considered procurement and obtaining quotations to be an administrative function which should be undertaken through the proper Council process rather than informally by an individual Councillor.

This was not a position I invented retrospectively. In my contemporaneous reply I expressly objected to being expected to obtain quotations for painters and decorators, pest control and replacement materials, and recorded that I had already raised my concerns externally.

The former Councillor then wrote to me: 'I have decided that F&E Sports and Football Lead should revert to another Councillor.' His email expressly referred to our disagreement about how F&E organised its responsibilities before communicating that decision. I immediately challenged this and asked whether my refusal to undertake the quotation work was the reason for his decision. I did not

accept that he could simply remove the role from me in this way. I stood my ground, did not agree to the proposed change and remained the F&E Sports and Football Lead.

This episode is particularly relevant when considered alongside the material I later obtained through my SAR. The former Councillor's submission to the Monitoring Officer characterised football matters and other work as examples of my alleged under-performance. The correspondence demonstrates that at least some of what was subsequently characterised as a failure to complete work arose from an underlying disagreement about whether I should have been undertaking those tasks at all.

I do not ask the reader to infer the former Councillor's motive from that sequence. I do believe the complete chronology is relevant when considering my experience of bullying and exclusion: I challenged expectations which I believed were procedurally inappropriate; I raised concerns about the way I was being treated; the former Councillor then told me that he had decided the Sports and Football Lead role should revert to another Councillor; I challenged that attempted reassignment and remained in the role; and counter-allegations about my performance were subsequently submitted to the Monitoring Officer without my knowledge

Training

I agree with the Governance Review's recommendation regarding Councillor training.

However, there is important context. When training was previously proposed to Full Council, only three Councillors positively engaged with it. One Councillor refused, another indicated that they would instead review another Councillor's notes afterwards, and the remainder did not respond to the request.

Training can only improve governance if Councillors actually engage with it.

Accuracy of Council Minutes

I have been heavily criticised for what has sometimes been characterised as my being overly particular - even 'anal' - about the accuracy of Council minutes.

I make no apology for wanting the Council's official record to be accurate.

I supplied the reviewer with examples of minutes that had been published and approved despite my spending weeks attempting to have inaccuracies corrected.

Council meetings were recorded, meaning there was an objective source against which disputed wording could be checked. I was able to use transcripts from those recordings when proposing corrections. Nevertheless, I encountered resistance to doing so.

In one response to my proposed corrections, I was told that my amendments were 'much more narrative minutes than we generally have' and questions were raised about the accuracy of a transcript taken from a recording.

My concern was never about producing a verbatim transcript of every Council meeting. It was about ensuring that the formal record accurately reflected material decisions and events.

Minutes are not merely administrative paperwork. They are the Council's permanent record of its decisions and, importantly, the authority on which subsequent action may depend.

The Vexatious Policy

I have serious concerns about the Council's Vexatious Complaints Policy and the way it has subsequently been used.

The first such policy was introduced in February 2022. I have been told by a resident, who also gave his recollection to the reviewer, that this followed a period in which the then Council had been receiving a substantial volume of correspondence from a person who is now a serving Councillor, including correspondence concerning hedgehogs. I do not hold the original correspondence and therefore present that history as the resident's recollection rather than as a fact I can independently evidence.

Since the present Council came into office, I believe the policy has evolved into something very different. In my view it has, at times, operated as a mechanism for silencing residents who have persistent but potentially legitimate concerns about Council actions.

The policy was rewritten and presented to Full Council during a period when complaints from residents were increasing. In my view, the effect of the revised policy was to make it more difficult for those complaints to be considered.

During the debate I was publicly shouted at by the then Clerk. Three Councillors subsequently raised their voices towards me, and I recall one Councillor appearing to smirk during the incident. I became visibly upset and left the room. The meeting continued. I returned several minutes later. Neither my departure nor my return was recorded in the minutes, nor did anyone check on my wellbeing.

The following day, several residents wrote to the Council expressing concern about the way I had been treated. To my knowledge those concerns resulted in no meaningful action.

I believe the current vexatious policy should be fundamentally reconsidered. Persistent correspondence can undoubtedly become unreasonable, and Council employees and Councillors are entitled to protection from genuine harassment. But persistence is not, by itself, vexatiousness.

A policy designed to protect a Council from genuinely unreasonable behaviour must never become a mechanism for protecting the Council from scrutiny.

Unauthorised Expenditure and the Council Credit Card

I also supplied extensive evidence concerning financial governance.

At Christmas 2025, a Councillor who had only recently been provided with a Council credit card, used it to make a purchase of approximately £69.72.

The Locum Clerk subsequently wrote that the Councillor had 'no recollection' of the transaction and that he was faced with entering it into Rialtas as an 'Unknown purchase' in order to reconcile the accounts. He described the situation as unmanageable and proposed stopping the Councillor's credit card.

It subsequently emerged that the expenditure related to items including equipment purchased for the Christmas event. The fundamental issue was not whether cable ties, lights or other relatively inexpensive items were useful. It was: where was the authority to spend public money?

The Locum Clerk himself subsequently stated in correspondence that a Councillor holding a Council credit card could not simply use it without the Clerk's authority.

There were further issues relating to expenditure for the Christmas event. The Locum Clerk recorded that shortly before the event he was presented with bills for a band and animals and asked where the documented Council authority existed to incur those costs. His correspondence records that he was effectively placed in a position where refusing payment could have resulted in elements of the Christmas event being cancelled.

When our new Clerk joined the Council in May 2026, she discovered that despite the previous concerns and proposal to cancel the credit card, it had not been cancelled and remained in the Councillor's possession. It has since been cancelled.

I make no allegation of personal gain or misappropriation. My concern is authority, control and audit trail. A budget is not, in itself, a blanket authority for an individual Councillor to spend public money, and a Council credit card should not be treated as an individual's spending authority.

Suggestion of a Governance Review

By the time the Locum Clerk had joined FPC, Newark and Sherwood District Council had already requested that Farnsfield Parish Council undertake a formal Governance Review. I believed that request should be taken seriously and considered by the Council. NSDC made the request for a governance review 3 times. Once in November 2025, then again in March 2026. Both times it was rejected by the then Clerk and Chair, without it coming to full Council. It was again requested in April 2026, where it finally came to Council for debate.

Pressure Concerning Residents' Complaints

I also became concerned about the position Councillors were placed in when attempting to deal with complaints submitted by residents.

I fully accept that Council employees must be protected from genuine harassment and unreasonable behaviour. However, elected Councillors also have a responsibility to ensure that legitimate complaints about their authority can be considered appropriately.

On 27 March 2026, when Councillors sought to have concerns raised by a resident considered through the Council's complaints process, the Locum Clerk wrote to Councillors saying he regarded them instead as 'ongoing harassment'.

"I shall walk out on the day that any agenda to hear [the resident's] ... 'complaints' is published, and I will never return."

The resident's name has been deliberately redacted because their identity is unnecessary to the point being made.

The Locum Clerk also stated that he would recommend to SLCC that no further locums be sent to Farnsfield Parish Council. He acknowledged Councillors' right to request an extraordinary meeting but stated that they would have to accept his right to walk out.

"I recognise that financial year-end is not a great time to be without a Clerk, but the choice is yours."

I found the position this placed Councillors in deeply concerning.

Whatever the merits of the underlying complaints, Councillors were being asked to determine whether a resident's complaints should even enter the Council's complaints process while knowing that doing so could result in the immediate departure of the Locum Clerk at financial year-end and a recommendation to SLCC that no further locums be supplied.

My concern is not whether the Locum Clerk agreed with the resident. It is whether elected Councillors could exercise their responsibilities independently while the continued availability of the Clerk was being presented as a consequence of their decision.

Subject Access Requests and Information Governance

The day after the incident where a resident was sworn at outside a meeting, the resident emailed the Council, marking the email "Private and confidential". This email was then circulated amongst Councillors, including the Councillor who was subject to the complaint. This raised serious concerns about the resident's safety.

There were also subsequent concerns surrounding confidentiality and the deletion of CCTV associated with that incident.

At the following Council meeting, I have recorded evidence of several Councillors - two of whom have subsequently resigned - laughing and joking about the Councillor going outside to 'fetch his boxing gloves' when he followed residents outside while locking the building.

For completeness and fairness, the Councillor who had been involved in the original incident was not part of that joking exchange. My criticism relates to those who treated the situation as something to joke about. I found that behaviour completely inappropriate given the seriousness of what had occurred.

I also believe the handling of Subject Access Requests demonstrates weaknesses in the Council's information governance.

During my approximately 20 months as a Councillor, to my knowledge only the Council has received three Subject Access Requests. One was my own.

The first SAR was completed as I joined the Council. A second SAR was submitted by a resident and was expressly marked confidential and for the attention of the Clerk only. That SAR was subsequently placed on a Council meeting agenda for consideration in closed session.

Although the discussion was therefore not conducted in public, the fact that a confidential SAR addressed specifically to the Clerk became a matter for consideration by Councillors raises, in my view, important questions about how the resident's confidentiality and personal data were being handled. During that closed-session discussion, the possibility of preventing or 'blocking' the SAR was raised. I specifically recall one Councillor stating that the SAR should be blocked altogether.

During the same closed session, a motion was passed to purchase a one-year subscription to Breakthrough, with the purpose discussed at the meeting being assistance with dealing with the SAR. My concern is that this expenditure had not appeared on the published agenda for decision. Councillors were subsequently informed that advice from Breakthrough was that Councillors could assist with redacting the SAR because the Clerk was overloaded. To my knowledge, the resident was not consulted before it was proposed that Councillors should become involved in processing and redacting a request which the resident had specifically marked confidential and for the Clerk's attention.

Material connected with this confidential SAR was subsequently supplied to an external printing company for printing. I do not suggest that either discussing a SAR in closed session or using an external processor is, by itself, necessarily improper. My concern is the cumulative handling of this particular request: a confidential SAR addressed specifically to the Clerk was placed before Councillors; blocking the request was discussed; Councillor involvement in redaction was subsequently proposed; and material was then supplied to an external organisation for printing.

In my view, this raises legitimate questions about confidentiality, access to personal data, decision-making authority and the adequacy of the Council's information-governance controls.

I also have concerns about the subsequent use of the Council-funded Breakthrough subscription. So far as I am aware from the occasions on which its services have been used, I have been unable to identify any delegated authority given to an individual Councillor to commission that advice independently.

The occasions on which I have seen Breakthrough advice relied upon have appeared to relate predominantly to matters involving or affecting individual Councillors, including circumstances in which their own actions or interests were in question, rather than advice obtained for the wider operational benefit of the Council.

I therefore believe there should be a clear audit trail capable of answering straightforward questions: who requested each piece of advice; who authorised them to do so; what Council purpose was being served; whether the advice was commissioned for Farnsfield Parish Council as a corporate body or for an individual Councillor; and where the relevant authority is recorded.

Having access to a Council-funded professional service is not the same thing as having delegated authority to use that service on the Council's behalf. I am not alleging that every occasion on which Breakthrough was contacted was necessarily improper. I am saying that where professional advice is obtained using a resource paid for from public funds, the Council should be capable of demonstrating the authority and legitimate Council purpose behind its use.

My Own Subject Access Request

The handling of my own SAR caused me particular concern.

My request arose after I became aware of an email chain in which a number of Councillors had been discussing me. I therefore exercised my statutory right to request the personal data held about me. Legal advice was subsequently sought concerning my SAR. I provided evidence to the reviewer concerning both the authority under which that advice was obtained and the subsequent attempts to restrict the searches undertaken despite the advice received.

The matter was then placed on a public Council agenda, including the question of expenditure associated with processing a Councillor's SAR. That placed me in what I can only describe as a procedural trap.

Because the agenda item related directly to me, I was required to declare an interest. The practical consequence was that more than 30 residents sitting in the meeting immediately became aware that I was the Councillor who had submitted the SAR.

I therefore had two choices: fail to declare an interest in a matter directly concerning me, or declare that interest and publicly reveal that I had exercised a personal statutory data-protection right. That is why I describe it as a procedural trap.

The appropriateness of what was happening was even questioned during the public session of that meeting.

I found the experience humiliating. The fact that I am a Councillor does not remove my rights as a data subject. Nor do I believe exercising those rights should automatically result in the identity of the requester being exposed to a room containing more than 30 members of the public. This was particularly troubling because the very reason I had submitted the SAR was that I had discovered Councillors discussing me in emails.

Confidential Staffing Matters and the Treatment of the Previous Clerk

I also believe there was, at times, a concerning lack of regard for the Council's responsibilities towards the previous Clerk as an employee.

During the period when serious employment issues concerning the previous Clerk were being considered, the Council wished to obtain external HR support. These were sensitive matters which required appropriate confidentiality and a clear distinction between the Clerk's role as the Council's Proper Officer and the Council's separate role as her employer.

That concern was compounded when the Clerk was subsequently required to circulate confidential papers relating to the Council obtaining the HR support concerning her own employment situation. Despite the fact that the Clerk herself was the employee whose circumstances were under consideration, the then Chair required the Clerk to circulate those confidential papers to the rest of the Council.

My criticism here is not directed towards the Clerk for circulating the papers. She had been placed in that position. My concern is with a governance structure which apparently expected an employee to administer confidential employer business concerning herself.

At the beginning of the closed session convened to discuss these matters, my clear recollection is that the then Chair complained about the volume of emails she had received concerning the situation, stating that she had been trying to watch Wimbledon.

I found that comment particularly troubling given the seriousness of the employment issues being discussed.

Whatever frustrations the then Chair may have felt about the volume of correspondence, I found the contrast deeply uncomfortable: an employee was dealing simultaneously with significant workplace difficulties, while the Chair responsible for helping the Council navigate those employment matters complained in a closed meeting that the emails were interfering with her watching Wimbledon, despite her actions causing the increase in emails.

For me, this was not simply an unfortunate comment. It contributed to my concern that insufficient regard was being given to the wellbeing of the employee at the centre of the situation.

The practical problem becomes obvious if that principle is followed through to its conclusion. If an employment process ultimately resulted in the Council deciding to terminate the Clerk's contract, would the Council expect that same Clerk, acting as Proper Officer, to administer the decision and effectively issue correspondence concerning the termination of her own employment?

That cannot, in my view, represent a sensible separation between the Council's administrative functions and its responsibilities as an employer. Appropriate alternative arrangements should have been put in place so that confidential employment matters concerning the Clerk could be administered independently, with appropriate HR support and without requiring the employee concerned to process material relating to her own employment situation.

Taken alongside the comment made at the beginning of the closed session, I was left seriously concerned about the level of regard being shown towards the Clerk as an employee at a particularly difficult point in her employment. This is important because good governance is not only about protecting the Council from risk. It is also about how the Council treats the people it employs.

Again, my objection was not to the Council taking action. The Council plainly needed to address the employment difficulties it was facing. My objection was to the way it was being done by the Chair.

Participation in the Governance Review

I also believe some context is necessary regarding Councillor participation in the Governance Review itself.

My understanding is that three Councillors initially refused to participate in the review. One of those Councillors subsequently engaged towards the end of the process.

I consider that significant. A governance review of this nature can only be as effective as the willingness of those involved to engage openly with it, provide relevant evidence and reflect upon their own actions as well as those of others.

In relation to the Councillor who eventually participated, I want to distinguish clearly between fact and my own perception. My personal impression was that the late engagement appeared more concerned with establishing what information had already been provided to the reviewer than with engaging constructively with the substance of the review.

That is my interpretation of the circumstances, and I cannot state what that Councillor's motivation actually was. I therefore do not ask readers to accept my interpretation as established fact.

What can be established is the extent and timing of participation, and I believe that should be considered when assessing the review process and the evidence available to the reviewer.

Mediation and Moving Forward

Mediation will only be effective if those participating are prepared to reflect honestly upon their own conduct, acknowledge where things have gone wrong and demonstrate a genuine willingness to change.

There have already been significant opportunities for that to happen. When the 2023/24 auditor's report identified problems, I did not see the acknowledgement, apology or individual accountability that I would have expected. Similarly, when S106 monies had to be repaid, I did not see meaningful acknowledgement of how the situation had arisen or acceptance of responsibility by those involved.

Wider Consequences of Councillor Conduct

Councillors are individually responsible for complying with any professional or regulatory obligations that apply to them outside the Council. Where an independent investigation makes findings concerning a Councillor's conduct in public office, it is for that individual, and any relevant employer or professional body, to determine whether those findings give rise to any separate obligations or consequences.

Accountability and Further Investigation

I want to be clear that, for me, the Governance Review cannot simply identify what went wrong and then draw a line underneath it without considering accountability where the evidence warrants it.

I remain particularly concerned about the handling of my Subject Access Request.

For the reasons set out above, I am still considering making a formal complaint to the Information Commissioner's Office regarding the handling of my personal data and my Subject Access Request. Given the concerns I have described regarding the handling of the other confidential Subject Access Request, I would also encourage the resident concerned to consider seeking independent advice and, if they share those concerns, to consider raising the handling of their personal data with the Information Commissioner's Office.

I do not presume to speak on that resident's behalf, nor can I determine whether a data-protection breach occurred in their case. That is for the resident and, if a complaint is made, the appropriate regulatory body to consider.

I also believe there needs to be accountability at Council level.

In my view, the former Chair's involvement in the handling of my SAR raises particularly serious questions, and I believe she should reflect carefully upon whether her position as a Councillor remains tenable.

However, that call for reflection is not confined to one individual. All Councillors whose actions or omissions are materially relevant to the matters identified within the evidence or the Governance Review should reflect carefully upon their own actions, decisions and omissions.

I do not suggest that every Councillor bears the same responsibility. Different Councillors were involved in different matters and to differing degrees. There is also a distinction between actively participating in something and standing by while it happens.

I include myself in the principle of reflection. I have already acknowledged that there are occasions when, through frustration, I could have expressed myself differently. I am prepared to reflect upon my own conduct and learn from this process, and I believe it is reasonable to expect the same from every other Councillor involved.

What I do not believe would be acceptable is for the Governance Review to become an exercise in which responsibility is attributed to an abstract concept of 'the Council', while nobody individually reflects upon the decisions and actions that created the problems identified.

If any matter arising from this review is subsequently referred to the Monitoring Officer, the Information Commissioner's Office, the external auditor, the police or any other competent authority for formal investigation, I am fully prepared to cooperate and provide the documentary and recorded evidence in my possession.

If any matter ultimately results in a criminal investigation, I would likewise be prepared to provide a witness statement and give evidence concerning matters that I personally witnessed or for which I hold relevant evidence.

I deliberately make no assertion that a criminal offence has occurred. That is not a determination for me, this Council or this Right to Reply to make.

My position is simply that where evidence raises sufficiently serious questions, it should be preserved, disclosed to the appropriate authority where required, and independently investigated rather than dismissed or explained away.

Accountability is not about revenge or settling historic scores. It is about ensuring that where public money, public records, personal data and the exercise of public office are concerned, appropriate standards are upheld.

Conclusion

I accept that Farnsfield Parish Council needs to move forward.

I also accept that mistakes have been made by people on different sides of the disputes that have engulfed the Council. I do not claim that every decision I have made or every email I have written has been perfect. There are occasions when, particularly through frustration, I could undoubtedly have expressed myself differently.

But moving forward cannot mean pretending that the past did not happen.

The evidence I supplied to the Governance Review ran to more than 240 pages. It included contemporaneous emails, screenshots, Council records and other documentary material. In some cases I also hold recordings.

That evidence included concerns about the treatment of residents; attempts to restrict scrutiny; deletion of Council information; questionable delegated authority; decisions and project development occurring outside transparent Council processes; financial controls; data protection; inaccurate minutes; the handling of complaints; Councillor conduct; and the treatment I personally experienced when I challenged some of these practices.

I support the recommendation for training. But training alone will not repair Farnsfield Parish Council unless there is also a genuine willingness to change its culture.

Councillors must be able to challenge decisions without being excluded. Residents must be able to question their Council without automatically being regarded as a problem. Staff must be protected from genuine harassment, but legitimate complaints must still be capable of being heard.

Financial decisions must have clear authority. Council projects must have an auditable decision-making trail. Minutes must accurately record decisions. Personal data must be handled appropriately.

And substantive Council business must be conducted through the Council's proper democratic processes rather than effectively determined elsewhere and subsequently presented to Full Council.

I did not become Chair because I wanted to continue the disputes of the past. I want Farnsfield Parish Council to become a Council in which residents can have confidence.

That requires transparency and accountability, but it also requires us to be prepared to acknowledge when things have gone wrong.

I was not trying to stop things being done. I was trying to stop things being done incorrectly.

And I believe that distinction is essential to understanding both the evidence I submitted to the Governance Review and the actions I have taken as a Councillor.