

STAG Proposal for Improved Effectiveness of Hartlebury Parish Council

Purpose of STAG

The Strategic Advisory Group was formed to discuss and develop medium term goals for the council.

NALC states the purpose of a parish council as

- **Representing the Community:** Acting as a voice for residents to local authorities, police, and developers.
- **Delivering Local Services:** Managing amenities such as allotments, community centres, parks, playgrounds, litter bins, and bus shelters.
- **Planning Consultations:** Serving as statutory consultees on local planning applications, influencing development in their area.
- **Improving Community Life:** Organizing community events, supporting local projects, and promoting environmental initiatives.
- **Managing Local Funds:** Raising a portion of council tax (the "precept") to fund local projects and improvements

Objectives of STAG

- Communication interchange with our residents. Our listening skills are rudimentary so we do not have a good grasp of the aspirations of the different sectors of our electorate. We also have no clear strategy for informing the electorate of our thinking, plans or achievements.
- Community development. Our efforts at community involvement have been piecemeal and without overall impact. We have had input from the Health and Wellbeing officer of CALC but engagement with this responsibility has been limited.
- Legacy. When our term is completed what will we summaries as our achievements? Will the council that follows have a clear direction of travel or will they have to start from scratch?

Results from STAG Workshop, September 2025

- The workshop was not well attended indicating a low level of engagement in matters of strategy
- Research indicated that councillors were not in a position to state the council's objectives to the residents. Councillors did not share understanding of residents' views, requirements or assessment of the council performance.

- Discussions at the workshop led to questioning of the rationale for the current advisory group structure. It was felt that the formation of groups was too influenced by the interests of individuals and not enough by the collective will on the council. This has led to an overcomplicated structure.
- The purpose and scope of advisory groups was not found to be clear or logical.

Basis for STAG Rethink of Advisory Groups

- The Parish Council is the authority and the decision-making body.
- Advisory groups exist to assist the Parish Council in its duties and planning.
- Councillors have identified functions that benefit from advice groups but have not considered the overall effectiveness of the structure.
- There are three functions that are common to most parish councils and would therefore not be substantially changed; Planning, Finance and Staffing. All other activities of advisory groups should be examined seeking improved efficiency
- Working groups are excluded from this review as they are set up for a purpose and disbanded once this is achieved.

Proposed New Advisory Groups

Estates

The Council owns or manages a number of open spaces accessible to residents of Hartlebury. These include the playing field, children's playgrounds, the MUGA, the allotments ground and currently the Parish Hall carpark.

We propose that the management of these areas are brought together under one team. This team will arrange monitoring of the estate, identifying work for the lengthsman, handyman and ground maintenance contractors and liaison with the clerk to ensure work is undertaken.

We do not accept that any open areas should be separately managed.

The complication to this is managing the renting of the allotments. We understand that administration of the contracts can be time consuming. We have the knowledge and experience to develop systems which will greatly simplify these processes. The final responsibility for this administration may be the clerk's but with the support of councillors as required.

Community Development and Communications

This group covers the interests of several existing groups. However, it should not be thought of as an amalgamation of current groups. Instead it is intended to work with residents to identify their concerns and priorities through communication i.e. listening to them and entering into conversation with them.

We envisage the priorities for the group to find ways of engaging all sections of the community using modern methods of research which the Health and Wellbeing Officer of CALC will assist us in developing and using.

We know that speeding, road safety and parking are concerns of residents so they should be of this group.

We also know that the Parish Hall Management Committee have plans to develop their facility as a community hub and we should anticipate working with them in this initiative.

Discussions have already started with Hartlebury stakeholders about developing a village calendar and it is anticipated that this will develop into community wide participation in events and projects.

The first step in the formation of this new group will to define terms of reference and scope.

Councillors will then be in a position to continue their involvement.

As a working summary of this proposal we provide the following table.

Previous Groups		Proposed Groups
Finance Advisory Group		Finance Advisory and Governance Group*
Audit Review and Financial Affairs Advisory Group		
Planning Advisory Group		Planning Advisory Group
Staffing Advisory Group		Staffing Advisory Group
Strategy Advisory Group		Strategy & Planning Group
Recreation and Amenities Advisory Group		Estate Advisory Group
Allotment Advisory Group		
Crime, Speeding, Traffic and Road Safety Group		Community Involvement and Communication
VAS and CCTV		
Events Advisory Group		
Digital communications and Data Protection Advisory Group		
Working party for action regarding the car park		Working party for action regarding the car park

* The change of name for this group is in recognition of their role in the preparation of the AGAR

The administration of the technical side of CCTV, video streaming, VAS, data protection etc. need to be considered to see if an on-going advisory group is required.

Alternative Views

During the most recent STAG meeting two other views were expressed

Keep the Current Structure

Some felt that no change was necessary. This included the following views

- The structure works so do not change it
- The council only has a year to run – why change the structure?
- There is no point to making changes without an underlying strategy
- Councillors are volunteers and cannot be told what to do.

STAG's views on these are that we would aim for the council to finish its term proud on the progress it has made and having built a solid foundation for the next council.

Also, with changes likely to come through the move to unitary authorities new responsibilities regarding communities are possibly coming our way.

By being part of the council we undertake to support all aspects of the council's work. As with any charity we volunteer for we may have preferences as to our role but if we support the aims of the organisation we will offer our skills and time where they are needed.

Keep the Current Structure but Introduce the Community Building and Communications Group

This is self-explanatory and aimed at the minimum disruption for councillors to their current work pattern.

STAG's view is that this is not fundamental enough to kick start the council into a new and vibrant future.

Further Considerations

During discussions at the open meeting the issue of mobile phone signal was raised. Since Atlas have pulled out of the initiative to build new masts little news has been forthcoming. As a council we should be thinking about our residents and what we can do to improve their experience living in Hartlebury.

The answer may be a subject for the new Community Building and Communications group or could be the subject of a time limited working party to resolve the issue.

