Rationale for the Proposed Wickham Market Parish Council Employee Structure

Background

The Parish Council's current Deputy Clerk, who undertakes a wide range of administrative, operational, communications and community-facing duties, is retiring. This provides an opportunity to review the existing structure and ensure that staffing arrangements are aligned with the growing needs of the parish.

Rather than recruiting directly into the existing role, the Council proposes to redistribute the responsibilities across three specialist positions:

1. **Marketing and Events Officer**
2. **Cemetery Operations and Land Management Officer**
3. **Deputy Clerk**

The total staffing hours would remain broadly similar to the current arrangement, but responsibilities would be organised according to specialist skill sets, creating a more resilient, effective and sustainable structure.

The Need for Change

Over time, the Deputy Clerk role has evolved to encompass a diverse range of functions including communications, marketing, event management, cemetery administration, land management, volunteer coordination and governance support. While these activities have been delivered successfully, they represent very different professional disciplines and place considerable demands on a single individual.

The Council now manages a growing programme of village markets, community events, communications activities, open spaces and community assets. Increasing legislative, governance and compliance requirements also place additional demands on the officers who support the Council.

The proposed structure recognises that these responsibilities require different expertise and skill sets, and that greater effectiveness can be achieved through specialisation.

Benefits of the Proposed Structure

1. Better Alignment of Skills and Responsibilities

The new structure allows each role to focus on a clearly defined area of responsibility.

The Marketing and Events Officer would focus on community engagement, communications, social media, website content, markets and events. These activities require strong marketing, organisational and creative skills, together with the ability to engage positively with residents, businesses and visitors.

The Cemetery Operations and Land Management Officer would focus on managing the cemetery, allotments, footpaths, playing fields and other community assets. This role requires

a process-driven individual with an interest in the environment, land management and operational service delivery.

The Deputy Clerk would focus on governance, committee administration, project management, volunteer coordination, and strategic support for the Council. This role requires knowledge of local government procedures, legislation, and good governance practices.

By matching responsibilities to specialist skills, the Council can improve the quality and consistency of service delivery.

2. Improved Governance and Administrative Capacity

The increasing complexity of local council administration means that governance and compliance require dedicated attention.

Creating a Deputy Clerk role focused on council business will strengthen support for:

- Committee administration, including agendas and minutes.
- Policy implementation and review.
- Project management.
- Volunteer coordination.
- Value for money reviews.
- Funding applications.
- Website management for the Parish Council.

The role also creates a pathway for progression into a future Responsible Financial Officer (RFO) position and supports the implementation of improved financial management systems.

3. Enhanced Community Engagement and Economic Development

Wickham Market benefits significantly from its markets, events, communications channels and community publications.

A dedicated Marketing and Events Officer would have the time and expertise to:

- Maximise participation in markets and events.
- Support local businesses.
- Improve social media engagement.
- Maintain an active and up-to-date website presence.
- Produce high-quality editions of the Village News magazine.
- Develop a comprehensive image library for future promotional use.
- Identify grants and sponsorship opportunities to support activities.

This focus will help strengthen community involvement and promote the village more effectively.

4. Better Management of Community Assets

The Council manages a variety of important community assets and services, including:

- The cemetery.
- Allotments.
- Footpaths.
- Playing fields.
- Village gateways.

These functions require regular monitoring, contractor management, record keeping and engagement with residents and user groups.

A dedicated Cemetery Operations and Land Management Officer will improve oversight of these assets whilst ensuring that service standards, environmental objectives and community expectations are met.

5. Greater Resilience and Business Continuity

The current structure places a wide range of critical functions with a single officer. This can create challenges when workloads increase or during periods of absence.

The proposed three-role structure distributes knowledge and responsibilities across multiple officers, reducing organisational risk and improving resilience. It also creates opportunities for collaboration between officers and provides greater continuity of service for residents.

6. Increased Funding Opportunities

Both the Marketing and Events Officer and the Deputy Clerk roles will include identifying external funding opportunities. This will increase the Council's capacity to secure grants and other financial support for projects, events and community initiatives, helping to reduce pressure on local resources and budgets.

Conclusion

The proposed employee structure represents an evolution rather than an expansion of the Council's staffing resource. By dividing the current Deputy Clerk role into three specialist posts, the Council will maintain a similar overall staffing level while creating clearer accountability, stronger governance, improved management of community assets and enhanced community engagement.

The new structure reflects the increasing scale and complexity of the Parish Council's activities and will provide a more resilient, efficient and sustainable framework to support Wickham Market and its residents into the future.