

## NORTHUMBERLAND COUNTY COUNCIL

### TOWN AND PARISH LIAISON WORKING GROUP

At a meeting of the **Town and Parish Liaison Working Group** held in the **Committee Room 1, County Hall, Morpeth, NE61 2EF** on **Thursday 1 September 2016** at **11.00 a.m.**

#### PRESENT

Councillor K.O. Graham  
(in the Chair)

#### MEMBERS

Hunter I.E.

Wallace, A.

#### TOWN AND PARISH COUNCILLORS

Amble - Lewis, A.H.

Berwick upon Tweed - Roughead, G.

Blyth - Parker, M.

Corbridge - Hodgson, M.

Cramlington - Ambrose, T.

East Chevington - Claridge, P.

East Tynedale P&TC Forum -  
Martin, T.

Hexham - Cessford T.

Morpeth - Parker, D.

Norham & Islandshire Clusters -  
Huntley, R.

Seaton Valley - Stanners, S.

West Bedlington - Robinson, M.

#### OFFICERS

Kirsop, T.

Little, L.

Paul, G.

Rose, J.

Strettle, R.

Social Enterprise Manager  
Democratic Services Officer  
Director of Planning & Economy  
Economic and Inclusion Policy  
Manager  
Senior Policy Officer

#### 11. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for Absence were received from Councillors Daley (NCC), Stanton (Belford & Middleton), Wallace (East Bedlington), Sharp (Haltwhistle)

#### 12. NOTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

The notes of the previous meeting held on Thursday 9 January 2016 attached as **Appendix A** were received.

### **13. DEVOLUTION UPDATE**

G. Paul, Director of Planning and Economy provided an update on the progress on North East Devolution since the previous meeting. He advised that six of the seven Councils involved had agreed to the appointment of an Elected Mayor in 2017 with Gateshead being the non consenting authority. Two Orders would need to be approved by Government before any election was held, the first being to create a Mayoral Authority. The second would detail the powers of the Mayor, Cabinet and the Constitution of the Mayoral Combined Authority and would require a public consultation. Following the Brexit vote there were a number of questions raised regarding devolution and Government had confirmed they were still supportive of Devolution including an Elected Mayor.

The Combined Authority had delayed entering into public consultation until they had discussions with the Government regarding the continuation of funding following Brexit. It had been confirmed that European Union (EU) Funding on the current round of committed schemes would continue until 2020 however no commitment on funding after 2020 could be given. The Combined Authority would meet on Tuesday, 2 September to make a decision on whether to proceed to consultation on the Order. The Order would need to be confirmed by 4 November 2016 to allow six month's lead in for an Election in May 2017. It was clarified that if it was agreed to proceed, the public consultation document would be in respect of the technical details of the Order and not whether the public wanted Devolution.

Councillors commented that whilst the commitment for funding for the North East until 2020 was welcomed they still had concerns regarding funding after 2020. It was also recognised that difficulties would be encountered especially in relation to transport links if Gateshead continued to be a non consenting Authority. The Working Group was advised that if the Combined Authority agreed to Devolution without the involvement of Gateshead it was expected that Gateshead would be removed from the Combined Authority by the Government and would not be able to rejoin until the end of the first term in 2022.

It was questioned how Town and Parish Council's (T&PCs) would be involved in scrutiny arrangements for any new Combined Authority as approximately 50% of the North East was Parished and how T&PCs would be involved in the consultations. The Director of Planning and Economy advised that these questions would be put to the Combined Authority.

S. Rickett would email a link to all T&PCS once the consultation document was published on-line and it was expected that a link would be provided from the County Council's website and hard copies available in Service Centres and Libraries.

The information was noted.

#### **14. IMPLICATIONS OF BREXIT ON LOCAL GOVERNMENT**

R. Strettle, Senior Policy Officer provided an introduction to a briefing paper regarding the potential impact of Brexit and the key activity now underway regionally to respond to this development. The Briefing Paper was attached as **Appendix B** to the notes of the meeting. It was confirmed that a similar report would be available on the Council's website when the agenda for the Economic Growth & Strategic Transport Overview and Scrutiny Committee was published.

It was clarified that EU funding until 2020 was only confirmed for schemes which were committed. No confirmation had been provided on schemes which were still going through the process and this accounted for approximately 50% of the total number of schemes. It was hoped that some clarification would be provided in the Chancellor's Autumn Statement, however there was still a large amount of work to be undertaken to ensure that schemes could still be agreed.

The Working Group welcomed the very useful briefing paper.

#### **15. PROPOSITION FOR TOWN AND PARISH COUNCIL CONFERENCE**

A draft programme for the Northumberland Town and Parish Council Conference which was to be held on Thursday 13 October 2016 was circulated along with a synopsis of the purpose of the sessions. These documents would be filed with a copy of the notes of the meeting. The Conference would be held in the Council Chamber at County Hall commencing with registration at 1.30 pm and the welcome and opening at 2.00 pm followed by three separate sessions as outlined in the synopsis. The programme would be repeated at 6.00 pm with the Marketplace and refreshments being served at 4.00 pm in the staff restaurant for the attendees of both sessions. Places were required to be booked and, due to the limited space in the Council Chamber, the number of attendees from each T&PC would be restricted to two.

A discussion took place regarding the Northumberland County Council's (NCC) Medium Term Financial Plan which was the subject of Session 2 of the Conference. The Acting Head of Local Services advised that this would lead on from letters to T&PCs outlining the inevitable reduction to service standards due to financial pressures on the Council's budgets. £140m had been required to be saved over 4/5 years which was in excess of the total budgets for the previous six District Councils. It was thought that the opportunity for partnership working between NCC and T&PCs should be stressed to help maintain services and could also outline what statutory funding could be spent on to help provide clarity on the Council's budget situation. Examples of how T&PCs were undertaking more grass cutting were provided and whilst some T&PCs were happy to buy enhanced services from NCC these had to demonstrate value for money. It was clarified that partnership arrangements were non profit making and only covered costs incurred by NCC. The majority of work was undertaken by directly employed staff with some external contractors used for weed killing and verge maintenance.

## **16. NORTHUMBERLAND ASSOCIATION OF LOCAL COUNCILS (NALC)**

S. Rickitt, the Chief Officer of NALC provided information on the improved relationship with NCC. He also advised of the following:-

- Funds had been made available to provide training for smaller Parishes in the provision of information on websites in order to help them become more transparent to residents.
- The AGM of NALC was to be held on Saturday 1 October 2016 at Bomarsund Social Welfare. Jonathan Owen, the Chief Executive of the National Association of Local Council's would attend the 2017 AGM.
- It was expected that a training event would be held for T&PC Clerks in County Hall relating to elections and the rules surrounding purdah. It was hoped the event could be recorded and uploaded onto NALC's website.
- The National Council allowed larger Local Councils (with more than 6,000 population) direct access to their services, with nine from Northumberland now signed up.

In response to questions the following information was provided:-

- If his diary allowed, he would attend events arranged by groups of T&PCs to provide information to residents who were considering standing for election to their Town or Parish.
- He would look to get guidance in relation of the payment of allowances/expenses to Town and Parish Councillors and advised this had already been raised by the larger Councils Clerks meeting.
- Group meetings between NALC/NCC and the Society of Local Council Clerks would be held to formulate agendas for this Group, however issues could be raised through contact with J. Rose or himself. If required smaller groups could be formed to look at individual issues.

## **17. URGENT BUSINESS**

J. Rose, Economic and Inclusion Policy Manager advised that notices had been placed in telephone boxes regarding their proposed closure and a number of these were thought to be in remote locations throughout the County. There was a 90 day OFCOM process relating to proposed closures and she urged T&PCs to contact the Council if they felt there was a requirement to keep these telephones in their community i.e. if there was no mobile phone signal or due to the remoteness of the area. She would liaise with NALC to ensure the list of proposed closures was forwarded to all those affected.

P. Jones, Acting Director of Local Services advised that an updated "Who's Who" had been uploaded to the Council's website for T&PCs.

## **18. DATE AND TIME OF NEXT MEETING**

The next meeting was scheduled for Thursday 5 January 2017 at 11.00.