

## 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 2 March 2017** 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.

Corbridge - Hodgson, M.

Cramlington - Ambrose, T.

East Bedlington - Wallace, A.

Hexham - Cessford T.

Newbiggin - Todd, S.

Norham & Islandshire Clusters -  
Huntley, R.

Prudhoe - Dobson, E.

West Bedlington - Robinson, M.

#### OFFICERS

Jones, P.

Kirsop, T.

Little, L.

Rose, J.

Sanderson, J.

Stewart, A.

Director of Local Services

Social Enterprise Manager

Democratic Services Officer

Economic and Inclusion Policy  
Manager

Planning and Housing Policy  
Manager

Finance Manager

#### ALSO PRESENT

Anderton, M.

Nicholson

Rickitt, S..

SLCC

SLCC

NALC

#### 19. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for Absence were received from Councillors W. Daley (NCC), B. Stanton (Belford & Middleton PC), T. Martin (East Tynedale P&TC Forum), C. Rawlings (Ponteland TC) and Blyth TC.

## **20. NOTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING**

The notes of the previous meeting held on Thursday 1 September 2016 attached as **Appendix A** were received.

## **21. INTRODUCTION FROM THE SOCIETY OF LOCAL COUNCIL CLERKS**

David Nicholson from the Society of Local Council Clerks introduced himself and Monica Anderton who had been invited to attend meetings of the Working Group in a support role to provide any input from Clerks.

## **22. MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL PLAN UPDATE**

Andy Stewart, Finance Manager advised that the current Medium Term Financial Plan 2017 - 2020 (MTFP) had been approved by Council on 22 February 2017. A copy of the MTFP was circulated and would be filed with the Working Group papers. Information from various sources was fed into the MTFP and was used to try to balance the budget over the next three years.

It was explained that a four year funding offer from Government had been accepted in 2016 to allow more certainty for financial planning. The Revenue Support Grant would have reduced by £130m between 2010/11 to 2019/20 and a change to the way in which Local Government was financed would take place after 2019/20. Since 2013/14 Council's had been able to retain 50% of business rates or 100% on renewable energy, the Government were now considering changes to make Council's self financing. It might be that there would be some top-slicing or top-up between local authorities following an assessment of need. The key issue was to maximise income for the Council. A cap had been imposed in respect of the new homes bonus which reduced the number of years and a threshold applied.

The figures related to Council Tax were based on Band D properties and a 1.99% increase had been agreed. Council Tax was a key source of revenue for the Council and the need to maximise growth was highlighted. The key emphasis was the change from Government funding to Local Government funding which was important going forward. The reduction in Core spending power in 2017/18 for this Council when compared to the English or other North East Combined Authority (NECA) averages was much greater.

The need to continue to support small businesses by providing rate relief going forward following the Government's revaluation was highlighted. It was noted that the Government was clear in its wish that Local Authorities did not benefit from revaluation and could only benefit by growth of businesses.

In respect of the £20m which was required to be saved in 2018/19 S. Rickett requested that Town and Parish Councils (T&PCs) were notified 12 months in advance of any cuts to services in their areas to allow T&PCs time to consider if and how they could provide the services themselves. It was commented that whilst the Council would look to T&PCS to help with service delivery, the probability of Government capping T&PC precepts would also affect their

ability to do so. The need for the County Council to work with T&PCs to allow them to get an appreciation of what the impact of savings would be at an early stage to allow them to set precepts would be a more manageable situation for the T&PCs and would also allow communities more appreciation of why these decisions needed to be taken.

The Working Group was advised that all Councils were exploring ways of generating income outside the control of Government and Arch, which was wholly owned by this Council, was one way of achieving this along with the interest charged on loans made by the Council and charges for services provided for the NHS and other local authorities. The Highways Laboratory and Science shop provided services for both other local authorities and private clients. All managers were now focussed on maximising income and all details had been provided in the main budget report. In response to a comment regarding the need for communities to understand the role of Arch it was agreed that information would be shared with Members of the Group with the notes of this meeting.

### **23. LOCAL SERVICES UPDATE**

Paul Jones, Director of Local Services provided an update on the work of Local Services as follows:-

#### Neighbourhood Services

An enhanced programme of winter work had been undertaken for the last two years which included footpath and edging work which allowed easier maintenance during the summer months. Hedge cutting and shrub pruning had also been undertaken. £275,000 Additional investment had allowed for the retention of 25 summer staff to undertake this work and the mild winter had allowed completion of the programme. It was confirmed that the first grass cutting would be undertaken in mid-late March as soon as the ground conditions allowed.

Partnership working with T&PCs was continuing with resources put in to allow this. There were formal partnerships within the South East of the County and Services Level Agreements with other T&PCs of all sizes. These allowed an enhanced local area and team working and had the added benefit of providing employment and apprenticeships. This approach had also meant more Green Flag awards, improved results in Britain in Bloom and Tidy Britain Group and was recognised nationally as best practice.

A number of community litter picking events were being held in main Towns in Northumberland on 4 March as part of the Big Spring Clean which were to be supported by Neighbourhood Services. Events if arranged throughout the year would also be supported in terms of provision of litter picking equipment, sacks and removal of all collected waste.

## Technical Services

The draft Local Transport Plan (LTP) would be reported to the next round of Area Committees with priorities assessed against a set criteria and would include the provision of 20 mph zones as well as road improvements. Details would be finalised and the programme scheduled to commence on 1 April. The LTP allocation was £18.5m however an additional £1.07m had been included from our anticipated share of the National Productivity Investment Fund (NPIF) to improve local roads and public transport that was being administered by NECA. A prudent view had been taken of our likely allocation of NPIF funding by NECA and it was possible that a higher allocation may be forthcoming. Programmes would be brought forward from the reserve list if this additional funding was secured.

## Street Lighting

The Working Group was advised that this was a very complex and challenging programme to manage with several separate work programmes being undertaken. Difficulties had been encountered with the lantern programme being completed faster than the replacement of columns and issues with Northern Powergrid. In instances where things had been missed this had been done for a reason and not by mistake. The programme was expected to be completed in Ashington within the next two months and then continue to be rolled out across the County.

Comments were made by Councillors present that schemes had not been completed within their areas however they were advised that it was still hoped that the whole programme would be completed within the next 12 months. A map would be shared providing information on the progress. Columns had been redesigned to allow sufficient light at street level. Issues were highlighted specifically in the North of the County where previously lit paths and village greens were in darkness with problems being encountered by residents not being able to see the edge of pavements or holes in pavements. Meetings had been requested with Street Lighting to explore solutions but these had not taken place.

## Housing

£1.3m had been secured to provide affordable 'community led' housing schemes primarily in those communities with high second home and affordability issues. The Council was working with two organisations to develop a proposal that would provide professional and technical support in a facilitator role to support communities to come forward with schemes and to assist in their delivery. It was envisaged that further details of the proposed community led housing projects support arrangements would be shared with T&PCs in April.

An issue with rubbish escaping from refuse vehicles delivering to the recycling centre at West Sleekburn was highlighted. Any vehicles identified should be reported to Local Services.

## **24. DEVOLUTION UPDATE**

Janice Rose, Economic and Inclusion Policy Manager advised the Working Group that following four local authorities deciding not to proceed to consultation on the Devolution Deal for the North East the Government had withdrawn its offer. Discussions following this had been undertaken between Government and the three authorities who had wished to proceed had progressed. There was now the possibility of a Devolution deal covering Northumberland, Newcastle and North Tyneside. Whilst this would be on a smaller geographical scale it was still anticipated that a big economic impact could be achieved. The three local authorities would need to leave NECA and a new North of Tyne Combined Authority (NTCA) would be created. The process would be the same as outlined previously with the appointment of an Elected Mayor. All parties would be equal partners with a push for rural growth with DEFRA keen to work with the NTCA as the majority of deals up to this point had been in urban areas. It was hoped that an announcement would be made before Purdah and a session would be held with T&PCs following any such announcement.

## **25. NORTHUMBERLAND CORE STRATEGY**

Joan Sanderson, Planning and Housing Policy Manager advised that it had been agreed at Council on 22 February 2017 that the Northumberland Local Plan Core Strategy Draft Plan be submitted to the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government for Independent Examination by the end of March 2017; it was currently anticipated that the document would be submitted by 17 March 2017. It was expected that the public examination would be held mid summer 2017 and hopefully the Development Plan would be adopted in December 2017. An Independent Inspector would be appointed to look at all the evidence and representations on the formal stages to ascertain if the Plan was sound and met the legal requirements. All interested parties who had expressed a preference to attend the Examination could appear to put forward their views to the Inspector. Following submission the Draft Plan would be under the control of the Planning Inspector and any contact should be made to the Programme Officer.

The Working Group was also advised that 21 Neighbourhood Plans were in preparation with the Morpeth Neighbourhood Plan and Allendale Neighbourhood Plan already made. Consultation on the delivery document would include T&PCs. An Infrastructure Plan would accompany the Delivery Document, which would drill down to individual areas as there was a need to demonstrate that sites were deliverable and that the infrastructure needs could be met.

## **26. URGENT BUSINESS**

S. Rickett, Chief Officer of NALC advised that there had been an issue with an email sent from Elections in that a number had not been received or had been treated as SPAM. The Elections team had been notified but he asked that addresses be checked.

The Chair thanked everyone for their attendance and stated that much progress had been made over the last four years.