

# Northumberland Association of Local Councils

## ANNUAL REPORT 2020-2021

Union Enterprise Building  
Front Street  
Pegswood  
Morpeth  
NE61 6UF  
Tel: 01670 500810  
Email: [info@northumberlandalc.uk](mailto:info@northumberlandalc.uk)

<https://northumberlandalc.uk/>

# Northumberland Association of Local Councils

**2020-2021**

**PRESIDENT**

Mr David Woodard

**Vice Presidents**

Cllr David Francis

Cllr Alex Wallace

**Hon Treasurer**

Miss Gillian Turner

**Hon Auditor**

Mr Peter Basnett

**County Committee**

Mrs Anderton – East Tynedale Forum  
Cllr Barrell (Vice-Chair) - Choppington  
Cllr Bewley – Amble  
Cllr Bowlas - Berwick  
Cllr Coates – Longhirst  
Cllr C Cuthbert – Prudhoe  
Cllr M Cuthbert – Ashington  
Cllr De Simone - Cramlington  
Cllr Dunn – Ellington  
Cllr Gillanders – Hexham  
Cllr Hillan – North Sunderland  
Cllr Hood (Vice Chair) – Felton  
Cllr Hogg - West Bedlington  
Cllr Hughes - Milfield

Cllr Peden – Newbiggin  
Cllr Phelps – Dinnington  
Cllr Potts (Vice-Chair) - Blyth  
Cllr Rook – Blakelaw & North Fenham  
Cllr Sambrook – Pegswood  
Cllr Stanners – Seaton Valley  
Cllr Thurgood – East Chevington  
Cllr Varley - Ponteland  
Cllr Wakeling – Norham & Islandshire  
Assoc.  
Cllr Wallace (Chair) – East Bedlington  
Cllr Wood (Vice Chair) - Greenhead

**Chief Officer** Stephen Rickitt

Membership shown as at 31<sup>st</sup> March 2021

## **What we offer**

We are an association of local (i.e., parish, town and community) councils, which draws membership from Newcastle, North Tyneside and Northumberland. Our overriding aim is to develop and support active and effective local councils. This requires local councils to be aware of local needs and concerns, and to find a way of addressing them, whether by taking direct action themselves or by encouraging others to take the lead. Local councils have unlimited powers to raise money by precepting on the Council Tax, and this is an opportunity which can be used enthusiastically but prudently to support local initiatives and services.

To support local councils, we provide or arrange:

- A regular distribution of topical information by email
- Advice to clerks and councillors, on a wide range of topics: legal, managerial, financial, etc.
- Training: mostly short events, but also support for the CiLCA qualification (Certificate in Local Council Administration)
- Accreditation of applicants for the national Local Council Award scheme
- Initial processing of applications for loan consent (MHCLG)
- Access to new opportunities, ranging from insurance policies, equipment schemes, IT solutions
- Advice to community groups on forming new councils
- Assisting in arranging representation on bodies such as the Standards Committees, and the Northumberland National Park Authority.

In addition to providing this direct help, we also undertake policy and partnership work, on behalf of the local councils' sector. This involves monitoring changes, policies and proposals which may impact on local councils, and working to influence the decisions which are made by local government, agencies, and public utility providers. It also means working with other bodies to develop opportunities which can benefit local councils and their communities.

We are willing to assist the formation of new local councils in Newcastle and North Tyneside if local communities so wish.

Although we are an independent body, we also form part of the National Association of Local Councils, from whom we draw specialist support on legal and policy topics, and to whom we pay an annual financial levy.

## **Chairman's Foreword**

I am pleased to be able to report a successful year for the Association in unique circumstances.

Last year I said I was pleased in the way that Local Councils stepped up to the mark and assisted their communities. Pleasure might not be the most appropriate word, but the work done by Member Councils, their Councillors and Staff has been an inspiration. Local Councils are not only at the heart of their communities but in many cases are its heart.

The Association continues to remind the three principal councils, the national park authority, and the combined authority of the role of local councils as there may well be projects for which we are ideal partners.

I am particularly pleased that colleagues from other organisations have been willing to attend our meetings and engage in discussions of mutual interest. Many of the meetings concentrated on issues arising from the pandemic and the professional expertise greatly assisted the County Committee's understanding of the varied and complex problems being faced.

I would like to thank Stephen, Margaret Tweddell (who keeps the financial records in order) and the other colleagues at CAN for their work, together with Gillian Turner and Peter Basnett (the Honorary Treasurer and Auditor respectively).

David Woodard (President) & David Francis (Vice-President) together with the Vice-Chairmen, Amanda Barrell, Tony Hood, John Potts & Mike Wood are a continuing source of advice and guidance for which I remain very grateful. David Francis also deserves our thanks for his continued service as our representative on the national NALC.

Finally, can I thank my fellow members of the County Committee, both past and present, for their work, friendship, and good humour.

Cllr Alex Wallace  
Chairman of the County Committee

## **Alec Trotter OBE – An Appreciation**

During the year, we learnt of the death of Alec Trotter, aged 98. Alec (full name John Alexander Trotter) was NALC's first ever secretary, appointed in 1947, following the Association's creation late in 1946. His formal employment at that time was as the Rural Officer of the Northumberland and Tyneside Council of Social Service, based in Ellison Place, Newcastle. NTCSS Rural Department was the forerunner of the Northumberland Rural Community Council, which Alec was pivotal in establishing as an independent body in 1951. However, as was common at that time, the chief officers of RCCs were also the chief officers of county associations of local councils, in an honorary capacity.

Alec was a campaigner. He was a strong supporter of community-led initiatives, and of the rights of rural residents not to be left behind by the post-WW2 improvements in the quality of life and employment opportunities which city and town residents were beginning to enjoy. This was not all confrontational. Alec was involved with a great many pieces of research into local conditions, in order to influence policies and develop new ways of working. Rural bus services, affordable housing for rent, mains electricity and the retention of young people in the countryside, are just a few examples.

He was not afraid to champion causes, whether it was the rights of Forestry Commission workers to become parish councillors, challenging the County Council to sustain inevitably small rural schools, fighting the BBC over the unambitious roll-out of 625-line TV to rural Northumberland, or lobbying the newly created district councils not to ignore the needs of the small rural service centres throughout the county.

Alec was also instrumental in creating and/or incubating a range of now-familiar institutions: the Citizen's Advice Bureaux; Age Concern (now Age UK); county-wide local history and arts bodies; the Small Industries Committee; as well as playing a part in the creation of the National Association of Parish (now Local) Councils and ACRE (the RCCs' national body).

However, within Northumberland, Alec will probably be remembered most for the knowledgeable, sympathetic and down-to earth practical advice which he gave to thousands of community initiatives, small businesses, parish councils, village hall committees and other charities. For much of his career, he was working with just a small team of one or two assistants. The filing systems of both NALC and Community Action Northumberland (the RCC) still contain file-notes written in Alec's own inimitable and almost-illegible scrawl.

Alec was awarded the OBE in the New Year's Honours list of 1973. He retired in March 1986, after almost 40 years in the service of Northumberland's communities.

Cllr David Francis

## **Introduction and Summary**

NALC is one of the county associations of local councils in England, which together form the National Association. 'Local Council' includes parish, town, neighbourhood, community, and village councils of which there are 161 in our area (Northumberland and Newcastle), although some do not have a functioning local council. There are currently no local councils in North Tyneside.

As at 31 March 2021, all but one of the functioning Local Councils are members of our Association and we were pleased to welcome back Haydon, Hazlerigg and North Gosforth Parish Councils.

NALC was formed in the 1940s and for many years received administrative and professional support from CAN (Community Action Northumberland). In 2015 a more formal separation of the two organisations occurred, although CAN still hosts the NALC Chief Officer and provides administrative support under a memorandum of understanding now extended for a further three years.

NALC is governed by a County Committee composed of representatives appointed by our member-councils. The chairman this year was Alex Wallace (East Bedlington) supported by Amanda Barrell (Choppington), Tony Hood (Felton), John Potts (Blyth) and Mike Wood (Greenhead) as Vice-Chairmen

## **The Coronavirus Pandemic**

This year was like no other in the Association's history. When the previous year was drawing to a close, the first restrictions had just come into force. As this report in being prepared (late April 2021) the country is slowly easing the lockdown restrictions imposed after Christmas 2020.

The effects on our residents and communities have been massive and the longer-term repercussions have yet to be seen. It is likely that some businesses will not survive, especially with the move to on-line shopping accelerating yet some smaller and independent retailers have been rediscovered. Tourism in our area gained a boost as people were not able in practical terms to holiday overseas. That brought challenges and issues for our communities as infrastructure was unable to cope in some areas and there were tensions with fears of the spread of the disease.

Lockdown caused stress and other mental health issues for many residents, with the restrictions on being able to see family and friends and to attend significant life events.

Homeworking became more common for some and its impact on our sector is considered below, but it emphasised the need for all areas to have reliable and fast broadband connections. Homeworking may mean that properties in rural areas become more desirable, but it will not only require connectivity but also good public transport. A negative effect may be more problems in finding affordable accommodation for those in the lower paid occupations.

## **Local Councils and the Pandemic**

It was immediately clear that Councils would not be able to meet in the traditional way of a physical face-to-face meeting in their Village Hall or Community Centre. Initially there was hope that the pandemic would be controlled within a few months, but those hopes were dashed.

Member Council quickly began to experiment with ways to continue their business

- Some held their meetings outside
- Initially some delegated sweeping powers to their clerk, who informally consulted Councillors by phone or email
- Some took their first steps in holding digital meetings.

As it became clearer that the pandemic was not going to be a short-term issue, nearly all councils started to use digital technology to hold their meetings. There were inevitable hiccups and the lack of high-speed broadband in communities in our area caused problems.

Digital meetings are a very different way for local councils to conduct their business and inevitably there was some who continue to struggle to cope with that medium. Most Councillors and their Councils rapidly established processes to hold digital meetings. It is a personal perception that Councils in our sector took to holding digital meetings far sooner than the City and County Councils. The Association used ZOOM as its digital meeting provider, but other Councils have used Teams or Google with success.

The Association offered taster sessions for people to experience digital meetings using zoom technology and at the same time updating Member Councils, Councillors and Clerks on the ever-changing picture of coronavirus legislation. Nine such sessions were offered for 104 delegates

The County Committee decided to hold regular Friday morning digital Meetings, mainly informally at first moving to more formal meetings being resumed.

Digital meetings meant that a range of external speakers were able to attend and discuss matters in some depth. Our guests included

- Jonathan Owen - the national NALC's chief executive (on several occasions)
- Kim McGuinness - the Police and Crime Commissioner, who also attended our AGM
- Several officers from the County Council who were able to give more detail on the effects of the pandemic and how our communities were coping and looking to the future.

It is unlikely that we would have been able to obtain the range of speakers if we had not been able to use digital meetings during the working week. As a matter of course the County Committee extended invitations to Members and Officers of both the City and County Council and their participation was a welcomed and greatly appreciated.

It is impossible to list all the various ways that local councils have assisted their communities, but examples are

- arranging or facilitating groups to collect prescriptions and or shopping
- grant aiding community groups who were suddenly faced with the lack of income
- funding groups being established to provide community support
- assisting the County Council in distributing food vouchers

Local councils saw the maintenance of their community's morale as being significantly important and many Councils arranged better Christmas Lights displays than in previous years. Blyth Town Council organised a "sleigh ride by Father Christmas" around their housing estates as a way of bringing a little bit the Christmas sparkle to their residents. Many

Others enhanced their ways of communicating to residents via social media, Cramlington Town Council having a significant local presence.

Wooler Parish Council supplied "treat boxes" to the housebound, not only in Wooler but also in the surrounding area.

Blakelaw & North Fenham Community Council organised a competition for children to design a thank-you for NHS staff.

Ashington Town Council were able to plant 75 trees to mark the 75<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the end of WW2.

### **Briefings**

The Association decided to cease referring "training sessions" as there was a wish to develop training as being not only an introduction to a particular subject but also a briefing and workshop for the more experienced counsellors to understand the changes that are inevitably occurring in our sector over the years changes.

The use of digital technology for training has revealed that a greater variety of training events can be offered given the limited resources of the Association as there is not the same imperative on holding meetings in different parts of the association's area to ease travel for those attending. There were a small number of attempts at holding briefings in the afternoon, but these generally did not prove to be successful, evening sessions starting at 7:00 PM remain the preference.

During the period 1 April 2020 – 3 March 2021, we offered 22 briefings with 293 bookings. These figures include the Zoom taster sessions as these developed into more of an update on general issues.



### **Assistance to member councils**

The initial part of this year was heavily focused on assisting Councils in coming to terms with working within the constraints of the pandemic legislation and guidance. As things began to settle the more usual range of questions came to the fall and we assisted Councils on such matters as Freedom of Information, financial issues, planning, highways, and preliminary work on the County elections due in May 2021.

The Association continues to retain the Parkinson Partnership who assisted eight Member Councils with a range of VAT issues. In addition, we sought formal legal advice from the national NALC's Legal Dept. on six occasions, as well as more times informally.

In addition, the Association has circulated 34 copies of the Enews and 38 copies of The Member Council Update during this year.

### **Working with the National NALC**

Our liaison with the national NALC continues, Cllr David Francis (Newton on the Moor and Swarland) is the Association's representative on the national council and chairs their Policy Committee. In my capacity as the clerk to Meldon Parish Council, I am one of three directly elected representatives on the national Smaller Councils Committee.

### **The Review of County Committee Constituencies**

The Working Group met in early 2020 and started work on a report for Members to consider but further work has been delayed by the National Emergency.

### **NALC's finances**

The unaudited accounts are in this report. We are pleased to report there was another modest surplus in 2020/2021. Event income was severely diminished as the decision was made to offer briefing at zero cost for the initial part of the year.

The Association has recognised the financial pressures on member councils and is keeping subscription increases to the minimum necessary.

## **Conclusion**

I started off by saying that this was the most unusual year in the Association's history and one that I hope will not be repeated. I could not have performed as well as I hope I have without the considerable assistance of colleagues and friends from Member Councils and the County Committee. It is invidious to name individuals but Councillor Wallace, Councillor Francis, and Mr Woodard, in particular, have given great help as have my colleagues at Community Action Northumberland, especially Margaret Tweddell who keeps the finances and figures in pristine condition

Stephen Rickitt  
NALC Chief Officer  
21 April 2021

**NORTHUMBERLAND ASSOCIATION OF LOCAL COUNCILS**

**Statement of Income & Expenditure**  
**1 April 2020 - 31 March 2021**

<u>2019-2020</u>		<u>2020-2021</u>	<u>2019-2020</u>		<u>2020-2021</u>
£	<u>Expenditure</u>	£	£	<u>Income</u>	£
17,056.79	National Association - Membership Fee	17,872.53	51,230.43	Membership Subscriptions	54,660.34
30,000.00	Community Action - Agency Fee	30,000.00	-	-	-
847.00	Local Council Review	825.00	1,179.50	Local Council Review	1,145.50
730.56	Meetings & Events	12.50	1,329.73	Training Events	206.53
200.00	Miscellaneous	400.00	81.00	Miscellaneous	-
-	-	-	200.00	Donations	100.00
350.00	NALC Website	950.00	-	-	-
3,582.93	Parishes Website Portal	1,699.99	4,500.00	Parishes Website Subscriptions	5,025.00
-	-	-	3.08	Bank Interest	1.61
-	Publications	119.99	-	-	-
5,756.46	Surplus	9,258.97	-	Deficit	-
<b><u>58,523.74</u></b>		<b><u>61,138.98</u></b>	<b><u>58,523.74</u></b>		<b><u>61,138.98</u></b>

1. Meetings & Events - AGM Expenses  
2. Miscellaneous - External Consultants (Advice Service)

**NORTHUMBERLAND ASSOCIATION OF LOCAL COUNCILS**

**Balance Sheet at 31 March 2021**

<u>2019/2020</u>		<u>2020/2021</u>	
€		€	€
	<b><u>CURRENT ASSETS</u></b>		
262.38	Sundry Debtors	62.27	
20,279.64	Cash on Deposit	<u>29,570.72</u>	29,632.99
	<b><u>LESS CURRENT LIABILITIES</u></b>		
168.00	Sundry Creditors	-	
-	Receipts in Advance	<u>-</u>	
<b>20,374.02</b>			<b>29,632.99</b>
	<b><u>FINANCED BY</u></b>		
14,617.56	General Reserve - Accumulated Surplus	20,374.02	
5,756.46	- Surplus for Year	9,258.97	
-	- Deficit for Year	<u>-</u>	
<b>20,374.02</b>			<b>29,632.99</b>

## MEMBER COUNCILS 2020-2021

Acklington	Featherstone	Norham
Acomb	Felton	North Gosforth
Adderstone with Lucker	Ford	North Sunderland & Seahouses
Allendale	Glanton	Nunnykirk
Alnmouth	Greenhead	Otterburn
Alnwick	Haltwhistle	Ovingham
Alwinton	Harbottle	Ovington
Amble	Hartburn	Pegswood
Ancroft	Hartleyburn	Plenmeller with Whitfield
Ashington	Hauxley	Ponteland
Bamburgh	Haydon	Prudhoe
Bardon Mill	Hazlerigg	Rennington
Bavington	Healey	Rochester & Byrness
Beadnell	Hebron	Rothbury
Belford with Middleton	Heddon on the Wall	Rothley and Hollinghill
Bellingham	Hedgeley	Sandhoe
Belsay	Hedley on the Hill	Seaton Valley
Berwick upon Tweed	Henshaw	Shilbottle
Birtley	Hepple	Shoreswood
Blakelaw & North Fenham	Hepscott	Shotley Low Quarter
Blanchland	Hexham	Simonburn
Blyth	Hexhamshire	Slaley
Bowsden	Holy Island	Stamfordham
Branxton	Horncliffe	Stannington
Brinkburn & Hesleyhurst	Horsley	Stocksfield
Broomhaugh & Riding	Humshaugh	Tarset & Greystead
Brunswick	Ingram	Thirlwall
Bywell	Kielder	Thropton
Capheaton	Kirknewton	Tillside
Carham	Kirkwhelpington	Togston
Chollerton	Knarsdale with Kirkhaugh	Tritlington & West
Choppington	Kyloe	Chevington
Coanwood	Lesbury	Ulgham
Corbridge	Longframlington	Wall
Cornhill	Longhirst	Wallington Demesne
Corsenside	Longhorsley	Warden
Cramlington	Longhoughton	Wark
Craster	Lowick	Warkworth
Cresswell	Lynemouth	West Allen
Dinnington	Matfen	West Bedlington
Doddington	Meldon	Whalton
Duddo	Melkridge	Whittingham, Callaly &
East Bedlington	Milfield	Alnham
East Chevington	Mitford	Whittington
Edlingham	Morpeth	Whitton & Tosson
Eglington	Nethererton with Biddlestone	Widdrington Station &
Ellingham	Netherwitton	Stobswood
Ellington & Linton	Newbiggin by the Sea	Widdrington Village
Elsdon	Newbrough	Wooler
Embleton	Newton by the Sea	Woolsington
Falstone	Newton on the Moor & Swarland	Wylam

CONSTITUENCIES FOR THE COUNTY COMMITTEE as at 31 March 2021  
Subject to review

The following Councils each have a seat on the Committee

*Ashington, Blyth, Choppington, Cramlington, East Bedlington, Newbiggin-by-the-Sea, Seaton Delaval and West Bedlington.*

Three seats are allocated for the Newcastle Councils

The remaining seats are allocated as follows using non-single Council constituencies

Allendale

*Allendale, West Allen*

Alnwick

*Edlingham, Eglingham, Longframlington, Felton, Newton-on-the-Moor and Swarland, Shilbottle, Alnwick, Hedgeley, Denwick, Rennington, Acklington, Warkworth, Longhoughton, Craster, Embleton, Newton-by-the-Sea, Alnmouth, Lesbury, Glanton*

Amble

*Togston, Hauxley, Amble by the Sea*

Berwick & Islandshire

*Duddo, Kyloe, Ancroft, Lowick, Horncliffe, Ord, Holy Island, Norham, Shoreswood, Berwick upon Tweed*

Ellington

*Ellington and Linton, Cresswell, Lynemouth*

Glendale

*Carham, Ingram, Ilderton, Kirknewton, Chatton, Ford, Kilham, Cornhill-on-Tweed, Earle, Roddam, Bewick, Chillingham, Wooler, Ewart, Doddington, Bowsden, Milfield, Branxton, Lilburn, Akeld*

Haltwhistle and West Tyne

*Coanwood, Plenmeller with Whitfield, Thirlwall, Horsley, Henshaw, Knarsdale with Kirkhaugh, Hartleyburn, Featherstone, Greenhead, Melkridge, Bardon Mill, Haltwhistle*

Hexham and Hexhamshire

*Hexhamshire, Haydon, Hexhamshire Low Quarter, Corbridge, Blanchland, Slaley, Hexham, Acomb, Sandhoe, Broomhaugh & Riding*

Mid Tyne

*Simonburn, Wark, Chollerton, Newbrough, Birtley, Humshaugh, Wall, Whittington, Warden*

Morpeth

*Stannington, Mitford, Hebron, Hepscott, Morpeth, Pegswood, Longhirst*

North Tyne & Redesdale

*Kielder, Greystead, Falstone, Bellingham, Tasset, Kirkwhelpington, Corsenside, Otterburn, Rochester, Bavington*

Ponteland and Rural West (South)

*Stamfordham; Ponteland; Capheaton; Belsay; Whalton.*

Prudhoe and East Tynedale

*Shotley Low Quarter, Healey, Stocksfield, Bywell, Hedley, Prudhoe, Horsley, Henshaw, Ovington, Ovingham, Wylam*

Rothbury & Coquetdale

*Alwinton, Cartington, Alnham, Elsdon, Rothley, Hollinghill, Nunnykirk, Hesleyhurst, Hepple, Harbottle, Whetton and Tosson, Biddlestone, Snitter, Nethererton, Callaly, Brinkburn, Whittingham, Thropton, Rothbury*

Rural West (North)

*Tritlington and West Chevington, Heddon-on-the-Wall, Matfen, Capheaton, Stamfordham, Belsay, Whalton Wallington Demesne, Meldon, Netherwitton, Longhorsley, Thirston, Hartburn*

Seahouses and Belford

*Belford, Ellingham, Adderstone with Lucker, Middleton, Easington, Bamburgh, Beadnell, North Sunderland*

Widdrington

*East Chevington, Widdrington Village, Ulgham, Widdrington Station and Stobswood*