



NORTHUMBERLAND ASSOCIATION OF LOCAL COUNCILS

Minutes of the meeting of the County Committee held at 10am on Saturday 23rd March 2024 at Stakeford and Bomarsund Social Welfare Centre. Stakeford. Northumberland NE62 5UD

Present in person: Cllrs:, John Potts, David Francis, Liz Dunn, Colin Wakeling, Paul Dancer, Mike Wood, Alan Taylor, David Nicholson. Monica Anderton, David Hughes, Paul Vaughan.

Present online: Cllrs: Gwen Woodman, Alex Wallace, Chris Cuthbert, Karen Overbury

Also Present

Mr Graeme Popay – Chief Officer [Actions marked as GP]

1: Welcome.

Cllr John Potts welcomed everyone.

2. Apologies for Absence.

Cllrs: Sue Bowman, David Woodard.

3: Minutes of the Meeting held on 27th January 2024

All agreed to accept the minute as a true record.

4: Matters arising

- **Bus Stops** – agreed to take up the offer of a seat on the Northumberland Local Bus Board – Colin Wakeling to represent NALC – representation from the four corners of the county would be preferable. **ACTION GP** to contact Neil Easton & Gordon Castle.

Paul Vaughan suggested that the Bus Drivers Union(s) should be represented. **ACTION PV** to contact Union representative

- **Future Meetings** – GP had met with Phil Hunter - NCC Assistant Chief Executive. To discuss using County Hall for future Committee meetings – this was well received and we are now awaiting confirmation that the budget can be covered by NCC.
- **County Training** – David Francis progressing with this.

5: Finance

The Financial report was tabled showing the current position. David Nicholson to contact Margaret re an alternative presentation format.

All agreed to accept the report.



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6: National Issues

David Francis gave a verbal report on recent national issues including:

- Martyn's law – consultation on the requirements and impact imposed on standard tier premises under the Terrorism (Protection of Premises) Bill. Looking at a more pragmatic approach to event management
- Parish Exemption from full audit regime – NALC has intensified its campaign to permanently exempt local (parish and town) councils from the rigorous category one full audit regime. The push for exemption aligns with NALC's long-standing advocacy for the autonomy and efficiency of local councils nationwide. As discussions continue, stakeholders await further developments regarding the future of local audit procedures and the potential impact on smaller authorities.
- .gov.uk email address - NALC recommends that councils adopt a gov.uk domain name to improve professionalism within the sector and better manage information within the council. Note – see the March ENews for full information.

7: Issues raised by Committee members

Recruitment and retention of Parish & Town Council members. – Colin Wakeling.

A discussion over the challenges local Councils are facing to recruit and retain good Councillors. No easy solution but good practice usually involves an induction process, training opportunities and a budget to support this, clear communication, “local projects to inspire and rally support”, civility and respect, representative of the community it serves. A good Clerk.

It was recognised that local councils were also struggling to attract Clerks – a recent SLCC meeting discussed this and challenges include: not enough hours to attract a Clerk, lack of experience in the Council and lack of experience Clerks willing to take on extra Councils, limited training opportunities, overheads that cannot be covered by the Council, precept low..

8: Larger Council Forum

At a previous meeting it was proposal by David Nicholson – *to support in principle the establishment of a larger Councils forum and the Introduction of locality based meetings throughout rural Northumberland to enable greater participation by member councils.*

It was agreed to raise this with NCC to gauge support in the first instance.

Glen Sanderson was very much in favour of this idea and asked Phil Hunter – NCC Assistant Chief Executive to work with the CO to come up with a format.

After discussion with members the following was proposed to NCC;

Three meetings per year – provisionally November, March & July

A 2 hour session = provisionally 1pm – 3pm,

Venue to be County Hall in a conference room – with online option.

Each meeting to follow a similar pattern, with suggested Agenda items being:



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1. Welcome by NALC Chair & NCC Leader.
2. NCC Budget topic discussion (max 20 mins & 10 min Q&A per meeting) :
 - November meeting: Emerging NCC Budget – presentation by NCC
 - March meeting: New NCC Budget – presentation by NCC
 - July – discussion of how the existing budget has impacted services and suggestion to improve – led by NCC
3. NCC – topical presentation (max 20 mins & 10 min Q&A)
4. Town Council presentation on good practice/new project etc (max 20 mins & 10 min Q&A)
5. NALC National Larger Associations topic – topic TBA
6. Open floor discussion
7. AOB

NALC are conscious of not appearing to exclude the rural and smaller councils and a meeting with Gordon Castle was very useful with the CO suggesting ways to improve the reach and attendance at the LAC's by introducing similar agenda items and the opportunity for hybrid attendance.

This was received well by members with some opposition regarding attendance and creating a split NALC membership. Cllr A Wallace & Cllr L Dunn, who are both County Councillors raised concerns over the budget promises as even County Councillors are not always kept informed of changes.

David Nicholson reiterated his initial proposal that was not a separate committee but a forum of larger Councils of the Northumberland ALC County Committee – it had no separate powers, it would provide greater opportunities strengthen the NALC family.

Attendance at the larger Council Forum would be via membership of NALC and to have a precept above a set threshold. Councils outside of the threshold would not be excluded from attending.

ACTION – GP to define the threshold and contact NCC to move this forward in time for the July meeting.

Note – since the meeting the CO has suggested to NCC that £140,000, which is NCCs threshold for submitting a breakdown of expenditure and income for inclusion with the Council tax leaflet. As this is a predetermined NCC definition then it makes sense to use this rather than make up a new one. The Councils are:



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Alnwick, Amble, Berwick, Morpeth, Ashington, Blyth, Choppington, East Bedlington, Newbiggin by the Sea, Seaton Valley, West Bedlington, Corbridge, Haltwhistle, Hexham, Ponteland and Prudhoe.

9: County Conference

Discussion of the format, last minute changes and content of presentations - it was agreed that members would complete the feedback form and return it to Iain Hedley

ACTION GP - to circulate a word document version of the feedback form.

10: Rob Murfin – topics to discuss at meeting

After discussion the following topics were proposed:

Better engagement with the public

Length of time to reply to requests.

Pre application advice – cost/time – is it always necessary to charge for this?

S106 funding.

Emerging Infrastructure levy

Planning application accuracy of location – instances of vague locations when a post code would suffice.

Enforcing the cleaning of roads around building sites.

Planning Enforcement in general

Town & Parish Council Liaison Group.

11: Any Other Urgent Business

None.

13: Future Meeting of the Committee

NOTE – now Saturday 11th May – 10am - Venue TBC