

NORTHUMBERLAND ASSOCIATION OF LOCAL COUNCILS

Minutes of the digital meeting of the County Committee held on Friday 10 December 2021 starting at 10.00 am.

Present:

Councillors David Bewley, Peter Coates, Graham Curry, Liz Dunn, Martin Dixon-Green, Graham Eastwood, David Francis, Christine Greenwell, Sylvia Hillan, Tony Hood, John Potts, Violet Rook, Colin Wakeling, Alex Wallace (Chairman in the chair) and Mike Wood

Also Present

Mr David Woodard – President
Ms Gillian Turner - Treasurer
Mr Stephen Rickitt – Chief Officer [Actions marked as SER]

Northumberland County Council

Cllr Isabel Hunter

Mr Tony Kirsop

Mr Iain Hedley

1: Welcome

The Chairman welcomed all present.

2: Committee Membership and Appointments

There were no candidates for co-option

3: Apologies for Absence

Apologies were received from

Councillors Paul Claridge, Chris Cuthbert, Rachel Locke, Alan Taylor, Simon Taylor and Gwen Woodman

Mrs Monica Anderton

Jonathan Owen – The national NALC CX

4: Minutes of the Meeting held on 22 October 2021

These were agreed as a true record and will be signed by the Chairman.

5: Matters arising, (if not otherwise on the agenda) including

- Election Recharges in Northumberland – The Chief Officer had circulated a response from the County Council. The Committee agreed to seek a meeting with the County Council's Leader and Chief Executive as the Association's concerns had not been addressed. In particular the costs being levied on those four Member Councils who had been inquorate, were not the marginal extra costs but were a standard charge for mid-term by-elections, nor had a satisfactory explanation been given for using a separate posting for the contested parish, town and community council elections. The Committee was also concerned at the continuing failure to provide cost indications so Councils could budget for an increasing election fund ahead of the May 2025 elections. **Action SER**
- Dormant Councils – A formal response is awaited from the County Council but, with the possible exception of Snitter, no immediate action is anticipated.
- Advance Northumberland – The Chief Officer confirmed that he had put potential dates to the Cabinet Member with responsibility for the company. **Action SER**

6: Coronavirus

The Committee noted the worsening national picture and that the national NALC, together with the LGA and other representative local gov. bodies were continuing to press for the power to hold digital meetings. The Chief Officer will write to the six MPs to seek their support. **Action SER**

7: Storm Arwen

7.1 Storm Arwen had hit the Northumberland coast on Friday 26 November 2021 causing considerable damage. The Chief Officer commented that the Dept. for Business, Energy & Industrial Strategy had launched a review aiming to provide an interim report within eight weeks. Although there had not been a formal call for evidence, the Committee agreed that a submission should be sent in early January following a call for evidence from Member Councils.

7.2 Issues raised during the discussion included

- Strength of the electricity supply infrastructure for both Northern PowerGrid and Scottish Power
- Lack of generators for use at local sub-stations
- Failure of the mobile phone networks
- Failure of broadband infrastructure
- Apparent lack of alternative means to pump water when mains electricity failed
- How to communicate when there are no internet or mobile phone connections

There was no criticism of the workers on the ground but there was concern raised for the lack of investment and the poor communications. At least two members of the Committee had been unable to attend as broadband was until down in their localities a fortnight after the Storm. **Action SER**

8: Meeting of Newcastle Member Councils

The Chief Officer reported on a successful meeting on 1 December attended by representatives of five of the six Newcastle Member Councils. The main area of concern and frustration was the apparent attitude of the City Council towards our sector. The Chief Officer is to prepare a note and to seek a formal meeting with the incoming new Chief Executive of the City Council in early 2022. **Action SER**

9: The Northumberland Local Council Charter

The Committee noted the draft revisions to the Charter (Version Three) [A copy is attached to the signed minutes] and made some further suggestions, including that made by Mrs Anderton to include staff in the part concerning civility. The Committee agreed the draft survey [A copy is attached to the signed minutes] with one further question asking if the County Councillor is allowed to speak and/or present a written report at meetings of the appropriate parish, town or community council. **Actions Mr Hedley & SER**

10: Bus Partnerships

The Committee received copies of the email exchange between Berwick-upon-Tweed Town Council and the County Council. [A copy is attached to the signed minutes] It was agreed that the County Council be asked to have an appropriate officer attend either an informal County Committee or the Town & Parish Liaison Working Group. **Action Mr Kirsop & SER**

11: The County Council's Town & Parish Liaison Working Group

Cllr Isabel Hunter informed the Committee of her intention, as Chair of the Group, that there should be fewer items so as to allow more discussion. She was also endeavouring to have the Local Services update given as a written report which could be updated at the meeting. The next meeting of the Group was on 6 January 2022, and she expected the agenda would include a Covid update. **Action Mr Kirsop & SER**

12: Workshop for Younger Councillors

All Members of the Committee were asked to encourage younger Councillors to provide their details to the Chief Officer. **Action All C'tee Members**

13: Finance

The finance report was approved [A copy is attached to the signed minutes].

14: Issues Raised by Committee Members

Matters had been raised as part of discussions on other items.

15: National Issues

Cllr Francis reported on several national matters including

- His successful re-election to the national Policy Committee
- The continuing attempts to get legislation to allow digital meetings
- Problems caused by Off-Road Trail Bikes in many parts of the country, and he knew this was an issue for our Member Councils

- Why the search engine on the main Govt website www.gov.uk did not include parish councils
- The concerns expressed about DEFRA's groundwater consultation which, if enacted, who have major implications got the capacity of cemeteries and the installation of ground-source heat pumps.

16: The Parishes Portal

The Chief Officer advised that changes had been made to improve accessibility in compliance with the legislation.

17: The Briefing Programme September 2021 – January 2022

The outcomes as shown in the table below were noted. Two planning briefing were being rescheduled due to the County Council's officers being heavily committed in the recovery from Storm Arwen.

Ref	Date	Title	Presenter	Bookings	Attendance
1	Thurs 23 Sept	General Introduction to Local Councils	NALC / SER	5	5
2	Tues 5 Oct	Finance and Budgeting for Local Councils	NALC / SER	10	10
3	Thurs 14 Oct	Planning – Permitted Development and Prior Notification	NCC	10	10
4	Tues 26 Oct	Planning – Highway and Rights of Way Issues	NCC	4	Postponed
5	Mon 8 Nov	Common Land and Village Greens	NALC / SER	5	4
6	Mon 22 Nov	Planning -Section 106s and Developer Contributions	NCC	15	9
7	Thurs 25 Nov	Chairing a Local Council	NALC / SER	5	4
8	Wed 8 Dec	Planning - Neighbourhood Plans – Lessons Learnt	NCC	17	Postponed
9	Tues 14 Dec	Planning – Conservation Areas	NCC	17	Postponed
10	Monday 24 January	Planning - Enforcement	NCC	16	
11	8 February	Planning – Highways and Rights of Way	NCC	10	
12	10 February	Standards	Bethan Evans / NALC	2	

18: Any Other Urgent Business

None, not noted above

19: Future Meetings of the Committee

The next formal meeting is held on Friday 25 February 2022 at 1000 by Zoom.

Councillors were reminded of the informal meeting being held on Friday 17 December 2021 to receive a presentation by Northumberland Communities together.

In closing the meeting, Cllr Wallace wished all present a very Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year.

Confirmed as a true record

and signed by the Chairman..... Date.....

DRAFT