

NORTHUMBERLAND ASSOCIATION OF LOCAL COUNCILS

Minutes of the digital meeting of the County Committee held on Friday 11 June 2021 starting at 10.00 am.

Present:

Councillors Paul Claridge, Peter Coates, Bill Crosby, Chris Cuthbert, Liz Dunn, David Francis, Christine Greenwell, Dani Henderson, Sylvia Hillan, Tony Hood, Rachel Locke, John Potts, Violet Rook, Alan Taylor, Simon Taylor, Paul Vaughan, Alex Wallace (Chairman in the chair), Debra Wilson and Mike Wood

Also Present

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

Northumberland County Council

Cllr Isabel Hunter
Mr Rob Murfin – part only
Mr Tony Kirsop
Mr Iain Hedley

The National Association of Local Councils

Ms Jane Moore – part only

1: Welcome

The Chairman opened the meeting by especially welcoming those attending their first meeting of the County Committee. He took the opportunity to pay formal tribute to those former Members of the Committee who had either retired at the elections or who had been unsuccessful in seeking re-election. They had all greatly contributed to the Association, the Committee and their communities.

2: Committee Membership and Appointments

The Committee formally co-opted the following Members to the Committee, the date shown is when their seats are due for formally due for re-election at the AGM:

Single Council Constituencies

Choppington Parish Council - Cllr Paul Vaughan (2021)

Newbiggin by the Sea Town Council - Cllr Paul Common (2021)

Seaton Valley Council - Cllr Susan Dungworth (2023)

Multi-Council Constituencies

Allendale - Cllr Dani Henderson (2022)

Hexham and Hexhamshire- Cllr Graham Curry (2021)

Newcastle (3) - Cllr Rachel Locke (2023)

North Tyne & Redesdale - Cllr Martin Dickson-Green (2022)

Rothbury & Coquetdale - Cllr Simon Taylor (2023)

Rural West (North) - Cllr Alan Taylor (2022)

Widdrington - Cllr Paul Claridge & Cllr Debra Wilson were both co-opted (2022)

3: Introductions

The Committee then introduced themselves.

4: Apologies for Absence

Apologies were received from

Cllr David Bewley
Cllr Matthew Cuthbert
Cllr Martin Dickson-Green
Cllr Susan Dungworth
Cllr Adam Hogg
Cllr Colin Wakeling
Mrs Monica Anderton

Cllr Glen Sanderson – Northumberland County Council

Ms Linda Scott – Newcastle City Council

Members of the Committee were reminded that if they are unable to attend, a substitute is welcome but to let the Chief Officer know so that they may be admitted to the meeting.

5: Planning in Northumberland

5.1 Rob Murfin, the County Council's Director of Planning, joined the meeting at this point, leaving after the conclusion of the discussion.

- a. He explained the increase in application being received by the County Council with over 6000 expected in 2021. At the same time lockdown has led to an increase in enforcement reports, a significant number of which seem to be

neighbour disputes, and the on-going work on the draft Northumberland Local Plan which he hoped will be adopted in the autumn.

- b. The Govt.'s Planning Bill is expected to be published in the near future and is projected to include great emphasis on a move to digital engagement.
- c. Mr Murfin stated that he wants to refresh and reset the relationship between Northumberland's Town Parish & Community Councils with the planning dept. He was concerned that some Councils' responses to planning consultations emphasise Non-Material Planning Considerations which he and his team are unable to take into account.
- d. The Planning Bill is likely to seek the establishment of a tariff for use in Section 106 Planning Obligations (aka Planning Agreements) with the possible diversion of a percentage of funds received being diverted to local councils with Neighbourhood Plans, as is similar for Community Infrastructure Levy.

5.2 The Committee then discussed the issue and amongst the points made were

- a. A willingness for the Association to work with the County Council to devise a "Concordat" setting out expectations and obligations
- b. The potential use of worked examples to assist Local Councils in focussing on Material Planning Considerations
- c. More briefing on planning matters for Local Councillors
- d. A need for joined-up thinking
- e. The possible dispatch of the weekly list of all applications being sent to all local councils, not only to ensure they are aware of applications in their area, but also others in neighbouring parishes which might nonetheless have significant effects on other areas.
- f. The potential use of a survey to gauge the information and resources which Local Councils might reasonably expect to be provided with or to require.

5.3 Mr Murfin was thanked for his attendance, and he will be in contact with the Chief Officer to drive matters forward. **Action SER**

11: National Issues

11.1 This item was brought forward as Jane Moore, the national NALC's Head of the Legal Dept and acting Head of Member Engagement had joined the meeting. She had to leave after this item.

11.2 Ms Moore explained the role of the national Legal Dept. Staffing levels meant that casework (such as document drafting) and litigation could not be undertaken on behalf of individual Councils, but they did provide advice to Member Councils, as was frequently requested by this Association. In addition, they endeavoured to provide general advice for our sector as and when there were changes in the law.

11.3 The national NALC are working with the Local Govt. Association (the LGA) on items of mutual concern including the draft Model Code of Conduct.

11.4 There was discussion about the recent litigation surrounding digital meetings – see also item 7 e below

11.5 Cllr David Francis then introduced himself as the Association's representative at the national NALC where he chairs the Policy Committee and sits on the Management Board. He gave the Committee a brief overview of key topics arising at a national level including

- a. Lobbying to extend for an increase in powers to be inserted into the Environment Bill
- b. The successful work in ensuring that public toilets would no longer be liable for business rates
- c. Responding to consultations from Govt. including those which could have significant effects on local Councils, an example being the recent proposals to allow larger 5G telecom masts.
- d. Issuing Good Practice information on a range of subjects, recent examples being climate change and youth involvement in our sector.
- d-e. Surveys will be carried out to gauge experiences of the recent elections. These will be directed at Councillors, Councils and County Associations.

11.6 In conclusion Cllr Francis wanted to record his appreciation of the work being done by the staff at the national NALC in today's difficult environment. **[Action SER]**

6: Minutes of the Meeting held on 23 April 2021

The draft minutes were agreed as a true record and will be signed by the Chairman.

7: Matters arising, including:

- a) Election Recharges – nothing further had been received from the County Council at the date of the meeting.
- b) Election analysis – an analysis of the Northumberland Local Council elections had been distributed to Members of the Committee and is on the website. All four Northumberland Councils who were inquorate at the May elections now have enough Members to be quorate. Thanks were paid to the Elections Team for dealing with the second call as swiftly as they did. **[Action SER]**
- c) Local Democracy Reporter – The Chief Officer has been advised of their identity and had added them to the circulation for the Enews.
- d) The Association's AGM – contact has been made with the Lord Lieutenant's Office **[Action SER]**
- e) Digital Meetings – the Committee discussed a draft response to the MHCLG's consultation [a copy is attached to the signed minutes]. Whilst there were different views on face-to-face or digital meetings, the Committee agreed the draft response whose thrust was to seek the power for Councils to have the choice on whether physical or digital meetings were best for their Councils and communities. **[Action SER]**

8: The Briefing Programme 2021

The Committee was advised of the updated figures for bookings and attendance:

Date	Event	Numbers Booked as at 11 June	Numbers attended
8 February	Social Media	18	17
11 February	Safeguarding	7	7
17 February	General Introduction	11	11
11 March	Preparing for Audit	5	4
7 April	The Annual Meetings	14	12 (one was a double booking made in error)
26 May	General Introduction	29	29
5 June (Sat morning)	General Introduction	9	7
22 June	Budgets etc.	33	
30 June	Intro. To Planning	33	
5 July	Chairing smaller councils	11	
19 July	Highways and Public Rights of Way	26	

In addition, four Local Councils had already arranged bespoke briefings for their Councils and staff with further such sessions being requested by other Councils. Further briefings will be arranged for the autumn, including repeats of the Introduction to Local Councils. **[Action SER]**

9: Finance

9.1 The Committee was pleased to note the healthy state of the Association's finances as shown in the report [a copy is attached to the signed minutes].

9.2 The Treasurer was able to report that 131 Councils had already paid their membership fees for which she was grateful.

10: Issues raised by Committee Members

This was the opportunity for Committee Members to raise matters which may be of general interest affecting Local Councils in Newcastle and Northumberland. Amongst those raised were

- a. Concerns about the number of food and coffee vans in some communities with adverse effects on local businesses and litter problems. Contrary views were expressed by some who welcomed the return of mobile retail facilities to communities who had lost shops etc. It was agreed to ask for further information from the County Council. **[Action SER]**
- b. It was agreed to repeat the Councillor Census in the early autumn to gain information on the trends in the make-up of Local Councils within our area. **[Action SER]**
- c. Cllr Isabel Hunter advised that she is the new Chair of the County Council's Town & Parish Liaison Working Group whose next meeting would be on Thursday 24 June 2021 at 10.30 am by Zoom.
- d. Concerns about fears of returning to public events in a general sense, not just Council meetings, and the potential effect on businesses in our area.

12: Future Meetings of the Committee

12.1 It was agreed that the next meeting is held on Friday 23 July at 1000 by Zoom.

12.2 Although the constitution allows Cllr Alex Wallace to continue as the County Committee Chairman until the meeting following the Association's AGM in the autumn, he asked Members of the Committee to let the Chief Officer know if they wished for him to continue until then or would they prefer to elect a chairman at the next meeting in July.

12.3 The Committee was advised of the Chief Officer's intention that a report will be brought to the Committee to enable a discussion on the future format of meetings, including whether they should be digital or face-to-face and what day and time is preferred. **[Action SER]**

Confirmed as a true record

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