

Northumberland Association of Local Councils

Minutes of the digital meeting of the County Committee at 10.00 am on Friday 19 March 2021

Present:

Councillors Barrell, Bewley, Coates, Cuthbert, Dunn, Francis, Gillanders, Hillan, Hood, Hughes, Peden, Potts, Rook, Trimming, Wallace (Chairman in the Chair), and Wakeling

Mr D Woodard (President)

County Councillors Wendy Pattison and Glen Sanderson (Cllr Sanderson for part only)

Mr I Hedley (Northumberland County Council)

Mr J Owen (Chief Executive – The National Association of Local Councils) (part only)

SE Rickitt (NALC Chief Officer)

1: Welcome, apologies for absence, changes to membership and declarations of interest

1.1 Cllr Wallace took the Chair and welcomed colleagues to the meeting.

1.2 The following apologies were noted:

Councillor Wood

Ms G Turner

Mrs Anderton

Mr T Kirsop (Northumberland County Council)

Ms L Scott and Mr, I Humphries (Newcastle City Council)

2: Committee Membership and Appointments

The were no candidates for co-option to the Committee

3: Draft minutes of the meeting held on 27 November 2020

The draft minutes of the meeting held on 23 October 2020 were agreed as a true record, subject to the date in the heading being corrected. The chief officer will make arrangements for these to be signed by the Chairman.

4: County Council Issues

4.1 The Chairman brought this item forward as he was aware that Cllr Sanderson had other meetings to attend. A Member Council had written to the Association expressing concerns about an issue involving the County Council. Councillor Sanderson acknowledged that it was

a difficult local situation, but he was surprised at the letter. He had tried hard in his time as the Cabinet Member with most contact with Parish Councils, and latterly as Leader of the County Council, to ensure that there was good cooperation between the County Council and Local Councils. Unfortunately matters seem to have gone awry in this particular case and he was already in contact with the Parish Council.

4.2 Looking at the broader picture he will ensure that the County Council's forward plan includes a review of the Town and Parish Council Charter for after the May elections.

4.3 Turning to other matters Cllr Sanderson informed the Committee of several items, to which Committee members responded with comments and questions. These included

- The Borderlands growth initiative had now been formally signed by both governments and the leaders of the five local authorities. Various projects within the county will now be assisted including the Alnwick Garden, The Maltings Berwick, and the Ad Gefryn distillery in Wooler
- The Town Deal with government is being worked upon.
- Climate Change remains a vital part of the County Council's work and he encouraged all present to look at the County Council's recently published Climate Change Action Plan at [Northumberland County Council - Climate Change Action Plan 2021-23](#)
- He was very pleased at the prospect of British Volt developing a very large factory at Cambois and council officers are working hard to bring this to fruition
- There were major problems on the county's roads with potholes caused by the bad weather

4.4 The Chairman thanked Cllr Sanderson for attending and for being prepared to answer comments from Committee Members during the discussion of the various items set out above

Note: The Chief Officer's Report is attached to the signed minutes and gives background for the following items

5: Coronavirus

The main issue discussed was the future of digital meetings and is noted under item 14.1 below.

6: The May Elections

Briefing and material has been sent to all Member Parishes and a reminder of the start of Purdah on 26 March will be included in the following week's Enews.

7: The LGA draft Model Code of Conduct

Neither the City nor County Council had yet indicated their stance on the draft Model Code. The Committee agreed to offer to work with both to devise a local version of relevance to Local Councils.

8: The Briefing Programme for 2021

The Chief Officer's comments were noted and agreed that £25 should be charged for Councils who want a whole council digital briefing.

9: External Audit

The AGARs were still awaited but the submission dates were not being altered as they had been in 2020.

10: The Memorandum of Understanding with CAN

The proposed Memorandum to run for three years from 1 April 2021 was approved,

11: The recent Coastal Summits held by the County Council

These had been or were to be attended by various Members of the Committee. NCC Cllr Pattison will forward notes for distribution to the Committee. It was agreed these are a useful vehicle to share problems and ideas. [See also item 14.1 below]

12: The County Council's Climate Change Working Group

The Council agreed to nominate

- Small Rural Community – Cllr David Hughes (Milfield)
- Market Town – Cllr Tom Gillanders (Hexham)
- Urban Area – Cllr John Potts (Blyth)

13: NALC Finance

The summary was noted, a copy is attached to the signed minutes.

14: National NALC Issues

14.1 Mr J Owen; the national NALC's Chief Executive joined the meeting. He was welcomed to the meeting and updated Members on several issues including

- Digital Meetings – the national NALC are participating in the court case seeking a ruling that digital meetings are permitted but the hearing is not likely before late April unfortunately. Members expressed concern at Govt.'s delay in making provision and discussed the potential for an advice note for Member Councils weighing up the risks of having digital meetings rather than face-to-face ones. The chief officer will keep the Committee advised of any developments.
- Coastal Communities – there had been national concerns expressed about the problems faced and the national NALC were considering holding a national event. The Committee and County Cllr Pattison updated Mr Owen on the Northumberland summits.
- Audit - He confirmed that the audit submission dates were changing back to those used prior to coronavirus.

- Banking - problems were being experienced nationally especially when trying to change signatories. He would welcome details of any issues so these can be raised with the British Banking Association by the national NALC.
- Local Council Borrowing – the national NALC continues to be concerned about delays being experienced by Local Councils. If there are particular problems, he urged that details are sent to the national NALC for their assistance in speeding responses.
- He encouraged Councils to enter the national Star Council Awards

At this point Mr Owen had to leave for a further meeting but before going was thanked for attending the meeting which all had found of considerable interest.

14.2 As the Association’s representative on the National Assembly, Cllr Francis had contributed to the range of issues in Mr Owen’s presentation.

14.3 As the clerk to Meldon Parish Council, the Chief Officer is a member of the national NALC’s Smaller Councils Committee. He updated the Committee on issues discussed on 9 February 2021 and at informal discussions which this Association hosts via ZOOM.

15: The Association’s AGM

The Committee agreed that the Chief Officer should seek the attendance of a VIP as it would be the 75th Anniversary of our founding. The Committee also endorsed the setting aside £500 for use in connection with the AGM.

16: Future Meetings

It was agreed to hold the next formal digital meeting on Friday 23 April 2021 at 10.00 am and then on Thursday 3 June 2021 at 1000– to be agreed by the Chair.

Confirmed as a true record

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