

NORTHUMBERLAND ASSOCIATION OF LOCAL COUNCILS

Minutes of the meeting of the County Committee held at 10.00 am on Saturday 2 July 2022 in the Stakeford and Bomarsund Social Welfare Centre, West Gordon Terrace, Stakeford, Northumberland

Present:

Councillors Chris Cuthbert, Graham Curry, Paul Dancer, Martin Dickson-Green, Liz Dunn, Keith Grimes, Paul Hedley, Alan Sambrook, Alan Taylor, Simon Taylor, Paul Vaughan, Colin Wakeling, Alex Wallace (Chairman in the chair)

Also Present

Mr David Woodard – President
Mrs Monica Anderton – East Tynedale Forum
Ms Gillian Turner - Treasurer
Mr Stephen Rickitt – Chief Officer [Actions marked as SER]

1: Welcome

The Chairman welcomed all present to the first face-t-face meeting of the Committee since January 2020. The Committee noted the passing of Cllr Hillan's husband, Mick Hillan, and sent their condolences. The Committee were advised that Alan Bowlas had stood down as a Councillor at Berwick-upon-Tweed Town Council and thanked him for his service.

2: Committee Membership and Appointments

The following candidates were co-opted onto the Committee

Cllr Paul Dancer – Amble TC – to replace Cllr David Bewley
Cllr Keith Grimes – East Bedlington PC – to replace Cllr Bill Crosby
Cllr Paul Hitchenes – Dinnington PC – to replace Cllr Steven Phelps

3: Apologies for Absence

Apologies were received from

Councillors

David Bewley, Paul Claridge, Peter Coates, Matthew Cuthbert, Graham Eastwood, David Francis, Christine Greenwell, Sylvia Hillan, Paul Hitchenes, Adam Hogg, Tony Hood, David Hughes, John Potts, Violet Rooke, Debs Wilson and Mike Wood

Northumberland County Council

Cllr Isabel Hunter, Cllr Glen Sanderson and Iain Hedley

Newcastle City Council

Linda Scott

4: Minutes of the Meeting held on 22 April 2022

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

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

- a) Armed Forces Covenant – The Chief Officer is in contact with the MoD. Members suggested he also involved County Cllr Gordon Castle, their Armed Forces Champion. One question raised was whether Councils bring in and store their Remembrance silhouettes after Remembrance Sunday or have them on permanent display. The question will form part of a brief survey in a Member Council Update. **Actions SER**
- b) Dormant Councils - It was suggested that an approach be made to the County Council to see if they would be prepared for an omnibus Community Governance Review formally dissolving all the dormant councils. **Action SER**
- c) Digital Meetings & Lobby Day – A suggestion was made that consideration should be given to producing a quarterly bulleting for all MPs in our area, including those on Tyneside with no local councils. **Action SER**
- d) Election Recharges – the comments from the Elections Team have been received. The Committee agreed with the Chief Officer's suggestion that dispatch might be delayed and incorporate the actual costs being charged for the by-elections in Eglingham (23 June 2022) and Ashington – Seaton Ward (7 July 2022). **Action SER**

6: Coronavirus

Members of the Committee resolved to inform the national NALC of their concern at the rising number of infections and asked that this be expressed to the Govt. as a strong reason for seeking the power to hold digital meetings. **Action SER.**

7: Storm Arwen

Members had received copies of the County Council's Review due to be discussed at the County Council on 6 July 2022.

In the course of a lengthy the following points were highlighted

- a) The Committee agreed to assist the County Council in implementing Recommendation 4.5.13 (b) "to host winter preparedness sessions to be conducted annually to include contributions from town and parish councils and other partners as appropriate, which would include the promotion of personal responsibility in readiness for emergencies." The full report is available via [Agenda for County Council on Wednesday, 6th July, 2022, 3.00 pm - Northumberland County Council \(moderngov.co.uk\)](https://www.northumberland.gov.uk/Agenda/Agenda%20for%20County%20Council%20on%20Wednesday%2C%206th%20July%2C%202022%2C%203.00%20pm%20-%20Northumberland%20County%20Council%20(moderngov.co.uk))
- b) The severe ~~confirms~~ concerns at the fragility of communications relying on mobile phone signals or internet availability. In parts of our area both are poor or non-

existent at the best of times. Telephone line repair times seem to be increasing. The Committee were advised that batteries can only power mobile phone masts for about four hours.

- c) The need for assistance to be directed to those in the greatest need, again emphasising the need for strengthened communication links.
- d) There was concern that damaged trees presenting dangers to the public, e.g. because of their proximity to a footpath, had not yet been felled.
- e) Notwithstanding the above points, the Committee welcomed the review and hoped that Openreach would engage with the County Council.
- f) The Committee wished to reiterate their thanks and appreciation to all the volunteers for their efforts during Storm Arwen and the later storms.

8: The Northumberland Local Council Charter

The draft Charter had been the subject of further discussion at the County Council's Town & Parish Liaison Working Group on 5 May 2022. The Committee emphasised the need awareness of the Charter to be cascaded down within the County Council's officer structure as there continue to be examples of work being undertaken on local council responsibilities without prior consultation with the appropriate council, the need to "Think Parish." The Chief Officer will chase up publication by the County Council. **Action SER**

9: Newcastle Issues

The Committee were disappointed that the meeting with the City Council's new Chief Executive due on 6 July has been postponed. The Chief Officer is endeavouring to rearrange. **Action SER**

10: The Retirement of the Chief Officer

The Chairman informed the Committee that the closing date for applications is Monday 11 July with short-listing on 13 July. The Chief Officer has given three months formal notice of his intention to retire, expiring at the end of August 2022. The Committee agreed to slip the formal leaving date to the end of September 2022 to assist in a smooth handover.

11: The AGM

The AGM will be on Saturday 8 October 2022 starting at 10.15 am in Felton Village Hall. The principal speaker will be Rob Murfin, The County Council's Interim Executive Director of Planning & Local Services, Regeneration, Commercial & Economy . Members suggest the theme is the Levelling Up Bill and the role of Local Councils in the planning system. **Action SER**

12: Finance

The report was agreed, and a copy is attached to the signed minutes

13: National Issues

The Chief Officer updated the Committee on a number of national issues, including

- a) The disappointing response by Govt. to the committee on Standards in Public life's 2019 report into local govt. ethical standards
- b) The ongoing Civility & Respect Project
- c) The evidence being given to Parliament on the Levelling-Up Bill
- d) The examination of the national NALC's governance structure
- e) The national NALC's monitoring of the pay negotiations. The Committee wished to advise Member Councils of the need to budget for greater increases in salary costs than has been the case in recent years.

14: Issues raised by Committee Members

- a) Cllr Vaughan raised the issue of responsibility for parish works being passed to Member Councils if the County Council is forced to make budget savings. The Chief Officer was asked to continue to emphasise the need for any indications of such thoughts to be provided to our sector in the early autumn so that Councils can incorporate it into their budget setting process.
- b) Cllr Hedley raised issues concerning feedback from NCC on LTPP bids. Members of the Committee made various suggestions including using the local County Councillor and making formal requests for updates. Generally Members perceived better feedback in the current year
- c) Cllr Hedley had also raised an apparent failure to consult on the replacement of a bus shelter. This had been discussed during item 8 as illustrating the need for County Council officers to "Think Parish".

15: Operation London Bridge

Members were reminded of the informal digital meeting on 15 July. The Committee expressed a wish that the Chief Officer's successor continues these moving forward. **Action New Chief Officer**

16: The Briefing Programme April 2022 as at 14 April 2022

The Chief Officer updated the Committee on the outcomes of the briefing sessions as shown below as at 1000 Friday 1 July 2022

Ref	Date	Title	Presenter	Bookings	Attendance
1	12 April	Preparing for Audit	SER	17	17
2	7 June	General Introduction to Parish Town & Community Councils	SER	9	9
3	15 June	Finance for Parish Town & Community Councils	SER	12	12
4	11 July	Public Rights of Way	SER	4	

5	26 July	Workshop – Climate Change & Parish Town & Community Councils	N'land CC Officers	18	
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Two face-to-face briefing have been given to Member Councils.

17: Any Other Urgent Business

None

18: Future Meetings of the Committee

It was agreed to hold a face-to-face meeting on Saturday 24 September 2022 at 10.00 am

In closing the meeting, the Chairman asked Cllr Vaughan to pass on their thanks to Choppington Parish Council for providing the venue.

Confirmed as a true record

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