

Northumberland Association of Local Councils

**Minutes of the digital meeting of the County Committee at 10.00 am on Friday 23
October 2020**

Present:

Councillors Barrell, Bewley, Coates, Francis, Hillan, Hood, Hughes, Peden, Potts, Rook,
Thurgood, Wallace (Chairman in the Chair), Wakeling and Wood

Mr D Woodard (President)

Ms G Turner (Hon. Treasurer)

Mr T Kirsop (Northumberland County Council)

Mr J Owen (Chief Executive – The National Association of Local Councils) – for item 8 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. He reported that Cllr Paul Hedley (West Bedlington TC) was in hospital with coronavirus and was asked to pass on the Committee's best wishes. The Chair was also pleased to report that Hazlerigg and North Gosforth Parish Councils have re-joined the Association.

1.2 Cllr Hood thanked colleagues for their support in nominating him to serve as the Association as the representative on the CAN Board.

1.3 The following apologies were noted:

Councillors Dunn and Gillanders

County Councillor Pattison

Mrs Anderton

Mr I Hedley (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 23 October 2020

3.1 The draft minutes of the meeting held on 23 October 2020 were agreed as a true record. The Chief Officer will make arrangements for these to be signed by the Chairman.

3.2 Mr Kirsop was asked to pass details of the County Council officer dealing with the current initiatives to supply ultra-fast broadband to the Chief Officer for insertion in an Enews. **Actions TK and SER**

4: Coronavirus

4.1 The Committee were alerted to a potential issue for residents in North Northumberland who access services in Scotland, an example being registered with GPs in Coldstream. The County Council has been requested to provide advice on their website.

4.2 Members remain worried about the effect of the lockdowns and proposed Tier Three restrictions on the hospitality sector and those who supply goods and services to the sector, expressing a hope that all would be able to access support funding.

4.3 Concerns were expressed at the availability of information being provided from Govt. and the difficulty in interpreting data so that informed choices can be made by residents. In particular, Members would like details of the percentages of the population being tested within communities and not just the number of positive test results.

5: Any other current issues raised by members of the County Committee

5.1 Cllr Francis drew attention to a scoring system being operated by the County Council's Planning Enforcement Team to assist in deciding which complaints to devote investigation resources. He had drawn the Chief Planning Officer's attention to the low score given to complaints by Local Councils. The Chief Planning Officer is to review this. Cllr Francis will keep the Committee advised of any further progress and the Chief Officer will follow this up as well. **Actions DF & SER**

5.2 The Chair expressed concern that the Coastal Conference had been limited to communities within the Coastal AONB and not extended to all the coastal communities within the county. The concept of a wider conference was welcomed as was that it had been chaired by the Leader of the County Council. It was hoped there will be a published action list. The Chief Officer was asked to raise these with the County Council. **Action SER**

5.3 Cllr Rook drew attention to the consultation on the North East Transport Plan. The Chief Officer will circulate details. **Action SER**

8: National NALC Issues

8.1 This item was taken here as Mr J Owen; the national NALC's Chief Executive had joined the meeting. He was welcomed to the meeting and updated Members on several issues including

- The national Comprehensive Spending Review – the national NALC are making strong representations that local councils must be able to access the promised funds as our sector can make a real impact within their communities
- The MHCLG have identified a technical issue with extending the ability to hold digital meeting beyond early May 2021 as the current legislation contains a sunset clause. Mr Owen believed that this was easily overcome if MHCLG have the will to do so
- The National Lobby Day will be held digitally on 2 February 2021 and he urged the Association to be involved. **Action SER**
- The LGA are finalising the national Model Code of Conduct for publication in December 2020. In Mr Owen's view that LGA seemed to have moved somewhat towards the position being local councils in this Association. There seemed little prospect of MHCLG bringing forward legislation for an effective sanctions regime in the near future.
- He drew attention to an event on Play Areas in early December. Attention was drawn to the problems being faced by local councils as the equipment in the inherited play areas transferred by the County Council were coming to the end of life. These concerns are shared by Councils of all sizes.
- Mr Owen was asked about any constraints on Council Tax rises in 2021/2022. At the current time, he believes that the MHCLG will not impose the referendum principles on our sector, but he stressed the importance placed by MHCLG on public consultation ahead of significant precept increases.
- The national NALC are running campaigns on several issues and would welcome details of engagement with younger parishioners by Member Councils of this Association. **Action SER**
- He drew attention to the legislation passing through Parliament, in particular the Bill to exempt public toilets from business rates and the Environment Bill. The Chief Officer will circulate details of the latter. **Action SER**
- He asked that the Association encourage Member Councils to respond to the Climate Change survey. **Action SER**

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.

8.2 Cllr Francis reported on issues considered by the national NALC's Policy Committee (which he chairs) including the request for MHCLG to legislate to govern the activities of the management companies being established on new housing estates. Committee Members supported this and gave details of instances within our area.

8.3 In his capacity as the clerk to Meldon Parish Council, the Chief Officer is a nationally elected member of the national NALC's Smaller Councils Committee. He updated the Committee on issues discussed on 24 November, including the potential for national workshops.

6: NALC Finance

The Hon. Treasurer introduced the Witten summary, a copy of which is attached to the signed minutes. She was pleased to update the Committee by stating that only three Councils had to pay their 2020/2021 subscriptions. Denwick Parish Council is now the only active Local Council who is not a member of the Association. The Chief Officer will continue endeavours to make contact and seek to persuade them to join. **Action SER**

7: NALC Chief Officer Report

The written report was noted by the Committee, a copy of which is attached to the signed minutes. The Committee was updated

- A clerks briefing on the 2021 elections will be held on 8 December with two identical sessions in the afternoon and evening. This will be co-presented with the County Council's Election Team.
- A digital briefing on Fol was held on 25 November, attended by colleagues from a range of Councils across our area. A social media briefing had been given a test run with a Town Council on 23 November. The take-up of places on evening briefings has been better than most physical briefing in pre-Coronavirus times, an experience shared by other County Associations. The Chief Officer will be devising a programme of post-New Year digital briefings. In the past travel issues had constrained offering briefings during the winter months. **Action SER**
- The Committee endorsed the concerns expressed in the report regarding the external auditors and these will be passed on to the national NALC. **Action SER**

8: National NALC Issues

See above

9: Future Meetings

9.1 It was agreed to hold the next formal digital meeting on Friday 15 or 22 January 2021 at 10.00 am – to be agreed by the Chair.

9.2 Informal meetings will be held as the Chief Officer is endeavouring to gain the attendance of external speakers on a range of topics. **Action SER**

Confirmed as a true record

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