

## Northumberland Association of Local Councils

### Meeting of the County Committee at 10.15 am on Saturday 18 January 2020 at the Storey Park Community Centre, Morpeth

Present:

Councillors Barrell, Bewley, Bowlas, Cuthbert, Dunn, Hogg, Peden, Potts, Rook, Thurgood, Varley, Wakeling, Wallace (Chairman in the Chair) and Wood

Mr D Woodard (President)

Ms G Turner (Hon. Treasurer)

Mrs M Anderton

SE Rickitt (NALC Chief Officer)

#### 1: Welcome, apologies for absence and declarations of interest

In opening the meeting, the Chairman paid tribute to the late Ray Butler, a Vice-President of the Association and a former Chairman of the County Committee. Cllr Barrell mentioned his help and being approachable when she first joined Choppington Parish Council. The Committee stood in silence as a mark of their respect.

Apologies were noted from Cllrs Coates, Francis, Gillanders, Hillan, Hood, Hughes and Tebbutt.

The Chairman was pleased to congratulate Cllr Francis on being elected Chair of the national NALC's Policy Committee and the Chief Officer who had been elected to the national Smaller Councils Committee in his capacity as the clerk to Meldon Parish Council.

#### 2: Committee Membership and Appointments

There were no co-options to be considered

#### 3: Minutes of the meeting held on 16 November 2019

3.1 The minutes of the previous meeting were approved as a true record and signed by the Chairman.

3.2 The meeting was advised that the Home Office consultation on unauthorised encampments had been issued on the day before the start of purdah for the General Election. It was understood that the need for transit site(s) is an issue being considered at the examination into the draft Northumberland Local Plan.

3.3 The Committee was informed that the County Council's Town & Parish Liaison Working Group on 16 January 2020 held an informative discussion regarding bus services in Northumberland. This will be the subject of a note to all Member Councils. Concerns were expressed about Highways England's understanding of the needs of residents of communities alongside the trunk roads. **Action SER**

#### 4: Financial Issues

The Committee noted and adopted the financial summary. [A copy is attached to the signed minutes] The meeting was informed that only three Councils had not yet paid their 2019/2020 subscriptions. **Action SER to chase up**

#### 5: NALC Chief Officer's Report

5.1 The NALC Chief Officer's Report and Supplementary Report were adopted subject to the following issues. [Copies is attached to the signed minutes]

##### *Briefing Programme 2020*

5.2 The draft briefing programme for 2020 was agreed with the following additions

- Finance – Member Councils should be asked if there is the demand for a briefing designed for those Councils who are VAT registered and the changes to on-line reporting
- There was clear support for a session on how to manage allotments given the issues and costs faced by many Councils
- Safeguarding was an issue being brought up when Councils were applying for funding. Member Councils will be asked to see if there is a demand for a session/sessions.
- Managing Common Land and Village Greens – authority was given to explore a briefing

5.3 The Committee noted that Northumberland would be holding Local Council elections in May 2021. It was agreed to arrange a series of briefings around the county for potential councillors following the summer break.

5.4 It was agreed to press the County Council for development control training for local councils with a view to the association organising such events if nothing was forthcoming from the County Council.

#### **Action 5.2-5.4 SER**

##### *Section 106 Money and its allocation*

5.5 The note circulated with the Supplementary Report was endorsed with the addition of advice that Local Councils should prepare, and consult on, a "wish-list" of items which might be funded by a developer. **Action SER**

##### *Anti-Social Behaviour and Petty Crime*

5.6 The Committee discussed the revised draft survey prepared after discussion with the County Council's Public Protection team. The chief officer was asked to give further thought to whether a definition of "petty crime" should be included. Subject to that issue and noting that it was essential for crimes to be reported, the survey was endorsed.

#### **Action SER**

#### 6: Newcastle Issues

Cllr Rook had no further information beyond that already circulated to the Committee.

#### 7: Northumberland Issues

The Committee noted the following meetings with the County Council

- Kris Westerby – 13 December 2019 – dealing with Highways and Local Services
- Kelly Angus – due on 10 January 2020 but cancelled by the County Council. The Committee confirmed that should the meeting be rearranged and discuss community governance reviews, there was no appetite or resource for the association to assist the County Council in a whole-county boundary review. At most Local Councils should be asked if they see a need for such a review in their area. **Action SER**
- The Town & Parish Liaison Working Group – 16 January 2020 – the Chief Officer will be circulating a note. **Action SER** *see also item 3.3 above*

#### 8: County Committee's Member Issues

8.1 Cllr Wakeling asked if some future meetings could be held in other parts of the area. Various options were canvassed, especially as only one member present had used public transport to attend the meeting. It was agreed that the group looking at the Committee's composition would consider the difficulty. **Action SER**

8.2 In response to a question, the chief officer confirmed that no suggested national pay scales had been announced for 2020/2021. The national NALC had been informed by the LGA that negotiations with the Trade Unions were to resume.

8.3 Cllr Hogg raised an issue regarding problems in identifying owners of open space. The chief officer will circulate a note as the position can be complex. **Action SER**

#### 9: National ALC issues

Cllr Francis had unfortunately had to give apologies at short notice, but the chief officer could not recall any urgent national matter. Following the meeting, Cllr Francis provided a note which is contained in the annex to these minutes

#### 10: Any other urgent business

None, not noted above

#### 11: Date of next meeting

This was noted as 21 March 2020 – venue to be announced

- 6 June 2020
- 5 September 2020
- 14 November 2020

At the chief officer's request, it was agreed that the AGM should be held in October 2020.

The meeting closed at noon

Confirmed as a true record  
and signed by the Chairman..... Date.....

## Annex – Item 9 – Note from Cllr Francis

Here is a summary of key points from the recent National ALC Policy Committee meeting, which I now chair:

- 1) **Climate change:** as agreed at last Autumn's conference, a key theme for this year is to help equip local councils to address a variety of issues connected to climate change. We will be collecting and disseminating a lot of good-practice/case-study examples. We will also be looking to promote legislative change, where local councils are currently constrained from playing a full role (renewable energy is an example). We will also be looking to lobby, where necessary, to enable local councils to take advantage of government grants and similar schemes.
- 2) **Campaign plan:** we have begun our annual 'refresh' of our campaign plan. However, we could not finalise this, because the Government are in the process of preparing a large number of new initiatives (some legislative, some programmes), and we need to ensure that we can contribute to, benefit from, or otherwise influence, them from an early stage. In furtherance of this agenda, our staff have already had an early meeting with MHCLG civil servants, on 7 January.
- 3) **Consultation responses:** we have recently made responses to a number of consultations and proposals, such as the Redmond Review of Local Audit, the draft Local Government Financial Settlement, the Glover Review of 'protected landscapes' (National Parks and AONBs) and the draft planning changes for '5G' telecommunications.
- 4) **Motions from county ALCs and councils:** we tend to consider 3 or 4 of these at each meeting. At last week's meeting, these included:
  - **Excessive audit costs:** we agreed with a Suffolk ALC motion, to try to address the excessive audit fees that arise from local residents who make persistent and vexatious complaints to the auditor. In one extreme case, a council with a £12kpa budget was faced with a £13k audit fee
  - **Climate Change:** we accepted Shropshire ALC's motion to take action to help local councils address climate change. This had already been agreed as a national campaign priority.
  - **Banking bureaucracy:** we agreed with a motion from Norfolk ALC to tackle High Street banks over their administrative difficulties in basic matters such as opening new bank accounts, or changing signature-mandates
  - **Car parking civil enforcement:** in our quasi-statutory role in the Sustainable Communities Act, we decided not to support Newquay Town Council's wish to appeal against the Department of Transport's refusal to change the law, in order to enable local councils to have full civil enforcement powers in their own car parks. Instead, we have encouraged the TC to approach Cornwall Council to negotiate a 'devolved role for the TC in these matters, and we will assist in assembling useful examples of similar co-operation, from other parts of the country