



Northumberland Association  
of Local Councils

**MINUTES OF THE ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING**

**Held at 10.15 am on Saturday 1 October 2016 in the Stakeford  
and Bomarsund Social Welfare Centre, West Gordon Terrace,  
Stakeford, Northumberland NE62 5UD.**

**Present:**

Cllr D Woodard (President in the Chair), Cllr R Butler (Chair of the County Committee), Ms G Turner (Honorary Treasurer) and representatives of 11 member councils.

Charlotte Eisenhart (The Improvement and Development Manager, The National Association of Local Councils)

Stephen Rickitt (Chief Officer)

Andy Dean (Chief Executive – Community Action Northumberland)

**1: Welcome and apologies for absence**

The President welcomed all to the meeting and invited participants to introduce themselves.

Apologies were given from Cllrs P Ashmore, A Dale, E Dobson, C Forster, T Hood, and C Rawlings

**2: Minutes of the 2015 AGM**

The minutes of the meeting held on 17 October 2015 were agreed as a true record and signed by the President.

**3: Matters arising, if any**

There were no matters arising.

**4: Annual Report 2015-16**

- a) Cllr Butler introduced the report which had been previously circulated. He thanked Cllr Potts for standing in during his recent illness.

- b) The previous year had been one of change with David Francis retiring and the recruitment of a new Chief Officer. Looking ahead, the County Council's need for budget savings would bring challenges and opportunities for member Councils. In his view, libraries and green services would be the likely areas for cuts.
  
- c) He was pleased to invite adoption and acceptance of the Annual Report which was agreed.

## **5: Finance**

- a) The Honorary Treasurer in moving the annual accounts paid tribute to Margaret Tweddell in handling the day-to-day business.
  
- b) Ms Turner presented the accounts for 2015/2016 which were received and adopted by the Meeting.
  
- c) The Honorary Treasurer then proposed that the annual subscriptions in 2017/2018 be increased by 2% as that was the likely increase from the National Association. This was agreed by the Meeting.

## **6. Appointment of Honorary Officers [Current Holders shown]:**

### **President – David Woodard**

Cllr Potts moved the re-election of Cllr Woodard, seconded by Cllr Butler, which was agreed.

### **Vice Presidents – Alex Wallace, and David Francis**

The re-election of Cllrs Wallace and Francis were agreed.

### **Treasurer – Gillian Turner**

The re-election of Ms Turner was agreed.

### **Auditor – Peter Basnett**

The re-election of Mr Basnett was agreed.

## **7. Appointment of County Committee Members**

The following were re-elected as shown in the table below

<b>Representative Area</b>	<b>Name</b>	<b>Year due to stand-down or be re-elected</b>
Alnwick	Tony Hood	2019
Cramlington	Trevor Ambrose	2019
East Bedlington	Alex Wallace	2019
Morpeth	David Parker	2019
Newcastle (1)	Colin Forster	2019
West Bedlington	Keith Dalton	2019
Widdrington Station	George Askew	2019

The following vacancies were noted and the Chief Officer asked to seek volunteers

- Allendale
- Ellington & Lynemouth
- Glendale
- Hexham & Hexhamshire
- Mid-Tyne
- North Tyne & Redesdale
- Seahouses & Belford

## **8. Presentation and Discussion**

### **INJECTING NEW BLOOD**

The President introduced Charlotte Eisenhart, the Improvement and Development Manager from the national NALC who led a discussion on how members Councils can attract new Councillors.

Amongst the points made were

- a) The recent increase in younger people becoming involved in national politics,
- b) Recent research published by the National Council for Voluntary Organisations showing 16-25 year-olds are significantly more active in voluntary work than previously,
- c) The work done in previous years by the Local Government Association (LGA) in carrying out a census of principal level councillors,
- d) How to succession plan without being presumptuous,
- e) The increasing age of Local Councillors,
- f) The risk for some Councils in having a large number of Councillors standing down at the same time,

- g) The research at (b) above showed a reduction in the percentage of 65+ year olds doing voluntary work,
- h) The problems of possible candidates for a Council fearing they would be forcing the replacement of a long-serving Councillor,
- i) Contrasting with (h), a fear of causing quorum issues for long serving Councillors wishing to retire,
- j) National campaigns seeking new Councillors not having the same impact as residents being energised by a local issue,
- k) The diversity of even the smallest communities
- l) The pro's and con's of Local Councils undertaking a skills audit of their members,
- m) The concept of Local Councils having plans showing their aspirations for 10/15 years in the future, thus assisting continuity,
- n) The dangers of some potential candidates wishing to enhance their CV's rather than serve their community,
- o) A turnover in membership being healthy and invigorating for Local Councils,
- p) A perception that younger members of communities tend to be more interested in specific issues (as a generalisation),
- q) In the Association's area only 1 in 6 Local Councils have faced contested elections in recent years
- r) When seeking potential candidates, experience shows that three approaches is often better than a single one but to expect only a success rate of 20% in those being approached, and
- s) Encourage Local Councils to see training as a priority and to have provision within their budgets.

The meeting agreed that the Chief Officer should conduct a "Councillor Census" before and after the 2017 Elections in Northumberland to gather data on the composition of our member Councils.

On behalf of the Association, the President thanked Ms Eisenhart for leading such an informative and thought-provoking discussion, appreciation which was endorsed by those present.

## **9: Council Tax Referendums**

As Urgent Business, the President asked the Chief Officer to introduce a draft resolution being promoted by the national NALC to all County Associations, which had

been circulated to member Councils earlier in the week. The motion was formally proposed by Cllr Potts and seconded by Cllr Todd.

In the discussion which followed, Members opposed the concept as restricting the ability of Local Councils to serve their communities especially when Principal Councils would be cutting services.

Ms Eisenhart asked that details were sent to the national NALC if any member Councils were able to give specific examples of how they would be adversely affected by the proposals for use in lobbying MPs.

The process and cost of such referendums, with Councils potentially having to change their budgets after the start of the financial year, was of grave concern, as was the suggestion implicit in the DCLG Paper that the thresholds could be extended.

The Chief Officer was asked to seek information from the City and County Councils regarding the possible costs of holding such referendums.

Mr Dean advised the meeting that ACRE would be making representations to the DCLG on the proposals.

The meeting then resolved

*1: This meeting welcomes and notes the successful lobbying by the National Association of Local Councils to ensure council tax referendums principles have not been extended to local parish and town councils since the introduction of these measures in the Localism Act 2011.*

*2: Local parish and town councils are an important part of communities and local democracy, and should be able to get on with the job of improving quality of life and well-being without central government interference.*

*3: It is vital local councils continue to have the freedom and flexibility to raise the resources they need to invest in local services, especially at a time when they are taking on services and assets from principal councils, often much valued services*

*which would otherwise cease completely and which communities want to see continue.*

*4: This meeting is therefore extremely concerned about a consultation published by the government on 22 September which includes proposals to extend council tax referendums to some or all local councils.*

*5: Local councils in Newcastle & Northumberland are doing a brilliant job improving their areas; whether it's by building community resilience, increasing house building through neighbourhood planning, providing local transport solutions, supporting the local economy and businesses, organising community events and festivals, helping meet social care needs and making places dementia friendly or giving grants to help local groups and organisations – all this and more for an average cost to residents of just over a pound a week.*

*6: This meeting also notes that local councils account for just 1.7% of the £26 billion raised through council tax in England and have demonstrated fiscal responsibility in recent years with overall increases in precepts going down, rising this year by just 6 pence per week as a result of local councils taking on services from principal councils and funding not being passed on to them.*

*7: Given their important and growing role, local councils should be celebrated and supported, not hindered by central government.*

*8: This meeting is therefore resolutely opposed to proposals by the government to extend council tax referendum principles to some or all local councils; and calls upon all local councils in Newcastle and Northumberland to respond to the government consultation stating their opposition to the proposals.*

## **10: Any Other Business**

Cllr Francis proposed thanks to Cllr Butler for his service as the Chair of the County Committee as Cllr Butler had indicated an intention to relinquish that position at the next County Committee.

The meeting warmly endorsed their thanks to Cllr Butler.

There being no further business the President closed the meeting.

Confirmed as a true record  
and signed by the President.....

Date.....