

**NORTHUMBERLAND COUNTY COUNCIL**  
**TOWN AND PARISH LIAISON WORKING GROUP**

At a meeting of the **Town and Parish Liaison Working Group** held in the **Council Chamber, County Hall, Morpeth, Northumberland, NE61 2EF on Thursday 26 May 2016 at 11.00 am**

**PRESENT**

Councillor KO Graham  
(in the Chair)

Daley, W.  
Hunter I.

Wallace, A.

**TOWN AND PARISH COUNCILLORS**

Blyth – Parker, M.  
Corbridge – Hodgson, J.M.  
Cramlington – Ambrose, T.  
East Bedlington – Wallace, A.  
East Tynedale P&TC Forum –  
Martin, T.

Haltwhistle – Hedley, C.  
Morpeth – Parker, D.  
Ponteland – Rawlings, C.  
Prudhoe – Dobson, E.  
Seaton Valley – Stanners, S.  
West Bedlington – Robinson, M.

**OFFICERS**

Hedley, I.  
Jones, P.

Little, L.  
Rose, J.

Stewart, A.

Locality Development Officer  
Acting Head of Local Services &  
Housing  
Democratic Services Officer  
Economic and Inclusion Policy  
Manager  
Finance Manager

**ALSO PRESENT**

Rickett, S.

Chief Officer, NALC

**1. MEMBERSHIP AND TERMS OF REFERENCE**

The Membership and Terms of Reference for the Town and Parish Liaison Working Group as agreed by Council on 3 May 2016 were noted.

## **2. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies for absence were received from R. Butler, T. Cessford, R. Huntley and G. Paul.

## **3. NOTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING**

The notes of the previous meeting held on Thursday 9 January 2016 attached as **Appendix A** were received.

Reference was made to an email sent to Members of the Group from Craster Parish Council regarding the Planning Protocols with no further action to be taken.

## **4. MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL PLAN**

A. Stewart, Finance Manager was in attendance to provide information regarding the Council's updated Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP). A table providing detailed financial information was circulated at the meeting and a copy would be filed with a copy of the Notes of the meeting. The table provided information on the estimated resources, including Government funding over the four year plan period; the estimated expenditure of the Council; and the Council Tax base. He detailed the changes to the way Government funding had been calculated and the impact on the Council; the expectation that Council's increase the levels of Council Tax and Business Rates collected; and highlighted the significant level of savings required to be made to balance the Council's budget over the 4 year period. It was emphasised that the council was operating in very challenging financial times, and the cuts that the Council faced over the period to 2020 were in excess of those faced by the average of all other England Authorities and also those in the North East Combined Authority area.

It was clarified that Devolution would not change the Council's financial position. In respect of the move to the retention of 100% of Business Rates this was highlighted as a potential issue for the Council especially if large businesses were lost. Members were informed that discussions were continuing as part of the Devolution proposals on fairer funding and the possibility of some form of neutralisation of the impact. Finer details regarding the payment of rates in Enterprise Zones was also required as part of the fairer funding discussions. It was clarified that the Dedicated Schools Grant was paid to schools however proposals for schools changing to Academies had been factored in to the Education Support Grant. The increase in the Adult Social Care Precept was negated due to the cost of the living wage with additional pressures required to be built into the MTFP.

The Chair thanked the Officer for the information which had provided a useful overview for the Town and Parish Councillors in attendance.

## 5. FUTURE COMMUNICATION AND ENGAGEMENT WITH TOWN AND PARISH COUNCILS

J. Rose, the Council's Economic and Inclusion Policy Manager advised of role of herself and her team in relation to Town and Parish Councils along with the challenges which needed to be met to provide an efficient service which met the requirements of the Charter. The report attached as **Appendix B** to the Notes of the meeting outlined proposals for the future communication and engagement between Town and Parish Councils with the County Council which would build on what was already in place. Proposals for a new Officer based group were outlined which would shape the agenda of this Working Group; undertake work on the Charter and Action Plan; and the organisation of the Conference.

A further document was tabled (a copy of which would be filed with the Notes) which provided information on the proposed frequency of service delivery meetings between Local Services and the Housing Delivery Directorate with the Town and Parish Councils in light of the savings of £46m required. The Acting Director of Local Services & Housing advised that due to the levels of savings required there would be an impact on the services able to be provided to the Community by the Council with some being reduced or cut completely. Close work with Town and Parish Council's was required to look at how services could be delivered within individual areas. S. Rickett advised that this would be considered by the Northumberland Association of Local Councils (NALC) County Committee and feedback would be provided through NALC.

It was commented that the proposed timings of the level C meetings might be too late for the smaller Parishes to set their precept. Discussions would be held with NALC regarding the timings of meetings and a date for the Conference. Separate discussions with individual Towns/Parishes would be held outside the wider consultations in respect of them taking over of services if they wished to do so. Concern was expressed by some at the speed dating format of the Joint Area Committees with a suggestion that 15 minutes per table was insufficient time. Information on suggested groupings/clusters would be welcomed by the Officers.

Discussions continued regarding the Town and Parish precepts with the possibility that the Government may decide to cap any increases in the future being noted. It was noted that any services provided by the County Council on behalf of the Towns and Parish Councils would need to demonstrate value for money. The shift in emphasis in respect of working with NALC was welcomed.

**RESOLVED** that:-

1. Further discussions take place with NALC to maximise the effectiveness of the Liaison Group, particularly in ensuring that it was fully representative of the network of Town and Parish Councils; and
2. The creation of an officer-based Council/NALC Co-ordination Group to help with informing the business of the Liaison Group and to undertake any tasks delegated to it by the Liaison Group be agreed.

## **6. NORTHUMBERLAND ASSOCIATION OF LOCAL COUNCILS (NALC)**

S. Rickitt, Chief Officer of NALC introduced himself and advised that the aim was to re-establish NALC as a resource for the Town and Parishes within Northumberland and encourage greater sharing of information between the local Councils. He advised that he had met with Political groups and Officers within the Council and would work with Officers to provide training on the changes within planning legislation. He hoped to have a full programme of training planned for post-election 2017. The NALC website would be changed and the resource would also be used to share policies etc. and it was hoped that a portal could be provided for each Town/Parish for the Clerks to upload information to ensure transparency. Contact with Mr Rickett could be made by email at [stephenrickitt@northalc.org.uk](mailto:stephenrickitt@northalc.org.uk).

## **7. FLOOD RESPONSE**

The Acting Director of Local Services & Housing provided a power point presentation on the response to recent flooding within the County. (Attached to the Notes of the meeting).

He advised that the west of the County had been worst hit by storm Desmond in early December with other parts of the County suffering with Storm Eva and Storm Frank. A large number of residential and business properties were flooded, including County Council Depots and Hexham Fire Station. There had been major damage to highway infrastructure including Ovingham Bridge which had only opened to traffic the day before the storm hit and was not now expected to be open until the end of August or beginning of September.

Emergency Community Assistant and Flood Actions Plans were activated with the Incident Room at West Hartford opened several times. All independent care home and home care providers were contacted in the areas affected with 90 vulnerable clients contacted over 5/6 December. Feedback had been very positive. The Out-of-Hours arrangements had worked well. The County Recovery and Restoration Plan had been activated with a Recovery Co-ordination Group established and impact assessment and action plan prepared. The estimated costs and the financial support to households and businesses were outlined along with the voluntary and community activity.

Members of the Working Group praised staff involved in the response and thanked them for all their efforts.

## **8. DEVOLUTION UPDATE**

The Economic and Inclusion Policy Manager provided an update on the Devolution proposals. She advised that some clarification had been provided on issues raised by the Councils involved. Fair funding was required to recognise the wider needs of the area and Northumberland and Durham had been given an assurance by both Government and the North East Combined Authority (NECA) regarding rural sparsity part of the funding. A Rural Affairs Portfolio holder had been appointed on NECA who would challenge and promote rural development. The rural element of the proposed Devolution was unique to this area and discussions would take place with DEFRA on what this meant and how it could be taken forward. The election of a Mayor for the Combined Authority would take place in May 2017 with powers transferred to the Combined Authority from the Government once it had been through Parliament.

## **9. CONFERENCE AND CHARTER TASK AND FINISH GROUP NOTES**

The Notes of the Conference and Charter Task and Finish Group (attached as **Appendix C**) were noted.

## **10. URGENT BUSINESS**

The Acting Director of Local Services & Housing advised that consultations were to commence shortly in respect of household waste sites. The Council was committed to the retention of all 12 sites but were proposing shorter opening times for the five smaller sites. The sites would operate on the four busiest days of Friday – Monday.

The Chair thanked those present for their attendance.