

## **NORTHUMBERLAND COUNTY COUNCIL**

### **TOWN AND PARISH LIAISON WORKING GROUP**

At a meeting of the **Town and Parish Liaison Working Group** held in the **Committee Room 1, County Hall, Morpeth, NE61 2EF** on **Thursday 15 June 2017** at **11.00 am**

#### **PRESENT**

Councillor G Roughead  
(in the Chair)

#### **MEMBERS**

Cessford T

Wallace R.

#### **TOWN AND PARISH COUNCILLORS**

Alnwick - Symmonds A

Amble - Lewis HA

Berwick upon Tweed - Davies G  
(Clerk)

Blyth - Potts J

East Chevington - Thurgood F

Morpeth - Best N

Newbiggin - Peden M

Norham & Islandshire Cluster -  
Huntley R

North Sunderland & Seahouses -  
Hall J (Clerk)

Ponteland - Varley A & Caisley C

Prudhoe - Cuthbert C

West Bedlington - Taylor C

#### **OFFICERS**

Jones P

Kirsop T

Little L

Roll J

Rose J

Stewart A

Director of Local Services

Social Enterprise Manager

Democratic Services Officer

Democratic Services Manager

Economic and Inclusion Policy  
Manager

Finance Manager

#### **ALSO PRESENT**

Jackson P

Sanderson GH

Leader of the Council

Cabinet Member

Anderton M

Rickitt S

SLCC

NALC

## 1. MEMBERSHIP AND TERMS OF REFERENCE

The Membership and Terms of Reference for the Town and Parish Council Liaison Working Group were circulated for information.

**RESOLVED** that the information be noted.

## 2. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for Absence were received from Councillors D Ledger (NCC), B. Stanton (Belford & Middleton PC), T. Martin (East Tynedale P&TC Forum), A Wallace (East Bedlington PC), Hexham TC and D Nicholson (SLCC)

## 3. NOTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

The notes of the previous meeting held on Thursday 2 March 2017 attached as **Appendix A** were received. A reference was made to the payment of the New Homes Bonus being discussed and that it would be useful to have more information on how and where this money was being spent as it was felt that S106 money was not meeting the additional infrastructure needs which resulted from large developments.

## 4. THE COUNCIL'S FUTURE RELATIONSHIP WITH TOWN AND PARISH COUNCILS

Councillor P Jackson, the Leader of the Council was in attendance to provide information on details of the new Administration's Manifesto and election campaign and how these would be taken forward as follows:-

- The Council would be more responsive and more work would be undertaken at a local level. Work undertaken by Town and Parish Councils (T&PCs) was valued and the local connection and knowledge could not be replicated.
- County Hall would remain on the current site in Morpeth with a four year rolling programme of refurbishment to be undertaken.
- Five Local Area Councils (LACs) of equal size and numbers of County Councillors had been created. Local Area Councils would ensure decision making at a local level but would not replace T&PCs. It was expected that increasing powers would be given to the LACs but at present they would consider Local Transport Plans (LTP) and planning applications within their areas of less than 100 houses. LACs would operate at a level above the T&PCs and it was hoped that the T&PCs would work closely with their LAC Chair.
- A fundamental review of the activities of ARCH would be undertaken in respect of the business objectives and the building up of an asset portfolio which it was considered was a risk to public money. The contribution of the housing and regeneration activities would be built on.

- T&PCs were leading on the development of the Neighbourhood Plans with two already made, three or four at the referendum stage with another 20 or so in development. The Council would commit to taking seriously and upholding these Neighbourhood Plans which had power in law.
- In respect of the Core Strategy, options would be looked at and a review undertaken within the next few weeks.

Councillor G Sanderson, Cabinet Member with responsibility for Local Services advised of changes that had already taken place within Local Services as follows:-

- It had been identified that insufficient consultation took place regarding road improvement schemes which could cause disruption. Consultation processes would be improved and streamlined.
- Changes had been implemented in respect of weed spraying and whilst this was possibly too late for much improvement this year, in future years would provide a significant improvement.
- More funding had been provided for verge cutting in the rural areas with two extra machines hired for 12 weeks in order to reach as many areas as possible.
- He would visit T&PCs along with P Jones, Director of Local Services if any T&PCs wished.

S Rickett advised that A Wallace, the Chair of NALC was very keen to work with the new Administration. Meetings had already been set up between the Senior NALC Committee and Councillor Sanderson and P Jones in respect of Local Services and Councillor Riddle and M Ketley in respect of Planning. He also asked for an early warning if there were any issues or services that the County Council were cutting and the T&PCs would be expected to provide to help T&PCs with their budget setting.

It was commented that improvements had already been noticed in respect of verge cutting in some areas and if T&PCs reported any areas which needed attention, including hedge-cutting, then this work would be carried out. It was also noted that no feedback had previously been provided to T&PCs on how priorities were decided for the LTP and why schemes put forward had not been included. Councillor Sanderson assured those present that dialogue between the Council and T&PCs would improve.

## **5. THE COUNCIL'S COMMUNICATION AND ENGAGEMENT WITH TOWN AND PARISH COUNCILS**

The report attached as Appendix B provided an outline of the Council's approach to communication and engagement with T&PCs and was introduced to the Group by J Rose, the Economic and Inclusion Policy Manager. Also included with the report was a copy of the Northumberland Town and Parish Council Charter, the membership of the five newly created LACs along with a map, and details of the local consultation for highways improvement schemes

carried out through the LTP and Members Local Improvement Schemes Programme.

The Working Group was advised that work was underway to look at the alignment and delivery arrangements to be put in place in respect of the LACs. Notification would be provided to T&PCs if there were any changes to staff contacts for their area in respect of Local Services and a dedicated Planning Officer would be appointed to each LAC. A Joint NCC/T&PCS event would be held in the October round of LACs and would follow the previously successful speed dating format.

LACs are to be held monthly to consider planning applications at 4 pm in North Northumberland, Tynedale and Castle Morpeth areas and 5 pm in the Cramlington, Bedlington and Seaton Valley, and Ashington and Blyth areas. Other Local Area Council business would begin either at 6 pm or on the conclusion of the consideration of any planning applications at the meetings in July, September, November, January, March and May. A full list of times and dates of LACs will be circulated with the notes of this meeting. A full scrutiny review would be undertaken in December 2017 to decide if any changes were required.

It was suggested that replicating the membership of the NALC County Committee for this Working Group would allow for more rural attendees although the subject of substitutes would possibly need to be considered.

**RESOLVED** that:

1. Officers be authorised to undertake a refresh of the Local Compact for the Liaison Group to consider at its next meeting in September including whether the Town and Parish representation should be the Northumberland Association of Local Council's County Committee.
2. The Annual Parish Council Conferences be held in October and Officers would prepare a proposed agenda for the session for consideration by the Liaison Group at its next meeting in September;
3. The establishment of the the five Local Area Councils as part of the County Council's committee structure be noted;
4. The strategic and operational Officer County Council Support available to Town and Parish Councils be noted; and
5. The approach of the new Administration in strengthening the consultation with Town and Parish Councils relating to Highways Improvement Schemes carried out through the Local Transport Plan and Members Local Improvement Schemes Programme be welcomed.

## **6. MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL PLAN UPDATE**

Andy Stewart, Finance Manager advised that the current Medium Term Financial Plan 2017 - 2020 (MTFP) had been approved by Council on 22 February 2017. A copy of the MTFP was circulated and would be filed with the Working Group papers. Information from various sources was fed into the MTFP and was used to try to balance the budget over the next three years.

A four year funding offer from Government had been accepted in 2016. The Revenue Support Grant, the main grant from the Government, would reduce by £130m between 2010/11 to 2019/20 and a change to the way in which Local Government was financed would take place after 2019/20. Since 2013/14 Council's had been able to retain 50% of business rates or 100% on renewable energy scheme. Government were now considering changes whereby there would be 100% retention after 2020. After concerns had been expressed regarding differences between authorities and what they might be able to raise, it was possible a mechanism could be introduced to allow top ups and tariffs put in place to smooth out differences. There was potential rewards for new growth with Council's being able to keep this element.

The MTFP planned for a modest growth in Business Rates income. There was a New Homes Bonus Scheme whereby Councils were rewarded for providing new housing or bringing existing properties back into use, this money had mainly come from the reducing RSG. Payment was based on the Band D Council Tax figure, currently limited to five years, however this was to reduce to four years and 0.4% of growth would not attract any New Homes Bonus, thereby reducing the amount of New Homes Bonus received by the Council.

The Council Tax figure was based on Band D properties and it was assumed that Council Tax would increase by 1.99% and the Adult Social Care element by 3% in 2017/18 and 2018/19 when the MTFP had been submitted. The Government would use these figures in their calculation of Council's Core Spending Power and would expect Councils to grow their tax base and increases annually by 1.99% plus 6% over 3 years for Adult Social Care Precept. Council Tax was now the major source of funding for the Council and its collection was critical.

The expenditure in the MTFP provided for known commitments, inflation and some demands for services especially related to Children and Adult Social Care. Efficiency savings of £6m were required in 2017/18 and £36m over the term of the Medium Term Financial Plan.

In response to a question regarding the payment of the New Homes Bonus it was advised that this was paid as a central grant to the Council and was not devolved to the individual Towns or Parishes where the homes had been provided.

The implementation of the Infrastructure Levy would allow more certainty on what developers would need to contribute but could only be collected when the Core Strategy had been adopted. It might also be that the spending of the Infrastructure Levy might be less closer to the actual development itself. S. Rickitt advised that Newcastle City Council had arranged for a Planning Officer to provide a presentation to some of their Members on the Infrastructure Levy and had indicated that they would have no objections to some of their neighbouring Parishes attend.

S. Rickitt also advised that the DCLG had started consulting on the introduction of capping for some of the larger T&PCs although they were not pursuing this at present.

## **7. DEVOLUTION UPDATE**

J. Rose advised that following the failure to reach agreement for the North East Combined Authority, Newcastle City, North Tyneside and Northumberland Councils had been invited to put forward proposals for a North of the Tyne Combined Authority and work had continued on that basis until it was put on hold for the General Election. It was confirmed that the Leaders of the three authorities were still committed to proceed with the proposals within the proposed timescales with the expectation that a Mayor would be elected in 2018. Steps would be taken to advise town and parish councils as to the content of any devolution deal following the Government announcement.

## **8. UPDATE FROM NORTHUMBERLAND ASSOCIATION OF LOCAL COUNCILS**

The Group was advised that closer officer links between NALC and the Council had developed over the last 9 to 12 months and a lot of joint working had been undertaken. Training resources for Members on the NALC website were being developed as a resource and work would continue with smaller Parishes in respect of transparency regimes and the need to have a website. It was recognised that Planning and Development Control remained a key concern and T&PCs should contact NALC if they required help.

## **9. FUTURE AGENDA ITEMS**

Suggestions for future agenda items were asked for with the following being discussed:-

- Training - there should be a schedule for planning training and more guidance provided including S106 agreements, neighbourhood planning etc. Councillor Jackson advised that a dedicated Officer had been appointed to help with the the development of Neighbourhood Plans. The possibility of a good practice session for T&PCs was suggested. It was clarified that Neighbourhood Plans would be reported to Local Area Councils for their endorsement before being reported to Cabinet for its agreement.

**It was agreed that Planning - including information on the Community Infrastructure Levy and Neighbourhood Plans be added to the agenda for the next meeting.**

- Provision of new leisure centres and other developments following announcements of reviews into Active Northumberland and Arch - Councillor Jackson advised that work a review would be undertaken in the next two to three months in respect of Active Northumberland and would include the investment plan. Changes to concessions to attract more customers and pricing would also be considered.

In respect of developments by Arch, Councillor Jackson clarified that work in Prudhoe which was underway would continue; Ashington Town Centre work was paused at the current time but it was intended that the site and road infrastructure be completed; the contracts for Ponteland Library site had been signed and therefore the work would continue; and an answer would be provided on what the position was regarding the proposed Ascent homes development the old Colliery site in Newbiggin

**Active Northumberland and Arch could be considered as topics for the Annual Conference.**

- Information could be provided on any resources which the County Council could offer / procure on behalf of / or provide local knowledge of which might result in cost efficiencies for the T&PCs i.e. printing.
- T&PCs could suggest further items for inclusion as and when they arose.

**10. URGENT BUSINESS**

J. Roll, Democratic Services Manager was in attendance to advise that a detailed protocol was being put in place regarding arrangements to be made by local authorities in the event of the death of a senior member of the Royal Family. The protocol was continually being updated, however S. Rickitt would provide a briefing note to all T&PCs advising of their responsibilities based on the Council's protocol. S. Rickitt would contact those T&PCs who would be involved in the more detailed aspects of the protocol and coordinate the work which would feed into the wider plans.