

National Association of Local Councils: report from David Francis to Northumberland ALC, July 2017

- 1) Precept capping referendums** In June I took the opportunity to recommend to the Policy Committee that a more-robust approach be taken by National ALC to the gathering and analysis of data on important policy issues, such as this. I am pleased that Andrew Tubbs is taking forward a wider-ranging survey of all local councils in England, which will embrace the questions on 'precept-inflation' which we had wanted. It is important that we promote a good response to this survey, from our member councils.
- 2) National ALC Governance Review** The National Council meeting on 12 July will be discussing the recommendations of this review. Overall, the outcome is likely to be less radical than some of us had feared. I am hoping that greater attention can now be given to improving the workings of the committees, rather than dwelling on the wholesale restructuring of committees.
- 3) Models and templates for smaller councils** We will shortly be making available on the National ALC website a number of model documents and good-practice guidance which we think will be attractive to those smaller councils who are daunted from adopting lengthy and complex 'one size fits all' models. A few of them are based on models which we drafted in Northumberland several years ago.
- 4) Data protection** At the Policy Committee, we discussed a potentially worrying problem which is just over the horizon: a new EU Directive on Data Protection, which will replace the existing legislation in 2018. It will impose new requirements on 'public authorities', demanding a high level of expertise within each authority. We agreed to work closely with the Information Commissioner's Office, with a view to avoiding a heavy-handed imposition on our sector.
- 5) Post offices** The Policy Committee supported a motion from the Kent Association, to urge HMG to assure its continued support for the Post Office network, which is struggling on very part-time hours in many rural areas.
- 6) Parkrun** I have contributed some comments to National ALC on a consultation by HMG to require local councils to allow 'Parkruns' to operate in parks and playing fields without charge. In practice, most Parkruns operate with little or no disturbance to other users of the space, but it does seem somewhat heavy-handed for HMG to legislate to remove a local council's right altogether to levy charges on its users, for group activities.
- 7) Publications** Three new National publications are now available: on Neighbourhood Planning, Finance/transparency and an update of the Good Councillors' Guide.