

Northumberland Association of Local Councils

County Committee

18 January 2020

NALC Chief Officer's Report

Part A: Items for discussions and/or decisions

A1: Policy Developments

Outcome of the General Election on the Local Council Sector

The national NALC issued the briefing in the Appendix on the new Government's Queen's Speech.

A2: North of Tyne Devolution and Borderlands

I attended the second Borderlands Conference at Slaley Hall on 25 November 2019. My note is in the Appendix

A3: Standards

The national NALC are participating in workshops organised on behalf of the LGA with a view to a national Model Code of Conduct for English Councillors being published at the LGA Conference in Summer 2020

A4: Unauthorised Encampments

The 28 November Enews drew attention to the Home Office consultation issued on the day before Parliament was dissolved. This seems to indicate an intention to criminalise certain types of behaviour. As at the time of writing no member council has responded with details of any specific issue.

The consultation is at

<https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/strengthening-police-powers-to-tackle-unauthorised-encampments>

A5: Local Democracy Week

Following the discussion at the last County Committee, I have been in touch with the County Council's Officers who deal with this. They normally contact schools in June, so we have arranged to meet in April.

A6: Public Transport

Following the discussion at the last County Committee, I have been in touch with the County Council's Officers who deal with this. There is a meeting of an operators' forum in Alnwick on 19 February 2019 and the association has been invited to attend suggesting the following item on the agenda

"How can parish and town councils liaise with bus operators about the services within their areas and to assist with publicising service availability"

A7: Briefing Programme 2020

I hope to be able to circulate an outline programme before the meeting. It has been suggested that we offer safeguarding training as this can be a grant requirement. Views are requested on the potential viability.

Part B: Items intended for information but updates can be provided and/or concerns raised

B1: Significant Meetings attended

- Meeting with Kelly Angus – due on 10 January

B2: Issues raised by member councils

These have included

- Joint Committees
- CCTV
- Content of Minutes
- FoIs

B3: Member Bulletins sent to the Chairmen and Clerks of Member Councils

28 November 2019 comprising

- A message from Cllr Alec Wallace, Chairman of the County Committee regarding the national Smaller Councils Committee
- PDF copies of the LGA's Guide to handling intimidation
- Information on a national model Code of Conduct
- Information on Website Accessibility
- Slides presented to the recent meeting of the County Council's Town & Parish Liaison Working Group regarding climate change
- The revised and updated guidance on disciplinary & grievance arrangements
- Northumberland's Council Tax Base & Precept for 2020/2021

3 December 2019 comprising

- Advice on Joint Committees and setting a precept
- Advice on accounting for the income and expenditure of Joint Committees

17 December 2019 comprising

- Seeking nominations for the Royal Garden Party

18 December 2019 comprising

- CCTV
- Winter Services in Northumberland
- Public Sector Contracts
- Payscales for 2020/2021
- LED Streetlights in Northumberland
- Christmas and New Year

9 January 2020 comprising

- The Royal Garden Party
- The Early May Bank Holiday
- The County Council's Draft Local Plan
- Minimum Wage Levels from 1 April 2020

B4: Section 137 Expenditure Limit

MHCLG have announced that the figure for FY 2020/2021 is £8.32.

B5: National NALC

Cllr David Francis has been re-elected to their policy committee.

In my capacity as the clerk to Meldon Parish Council, I have been elected to the Smaller Councils Committee.

B6: Website

The latest analytics are included with the papers for information.

B7: National Local Council Award Scheme

The Committee may be interested in the details of the Councils who have achieved the award across the country which are included in the papers.

Stephen Rickitt

NALC Chief Officer

9 January 2020

Appendix

The Queen's Speech

On 18 December, Her Majesty The Queen delivered the **Queen's Speech in the Houses of Parliament, setting out the government's agenda for the coming session, outlining proposed policies and legislation. There are a number of bills and policies of particular interest to our sector, including commitments to:**

- Find a long-term solution to social care that commands cross-party consensus
- Establish a Constitution, Democracy and Rights Commission to develop proposals to restore trust in how our democracy operates
- Build at least a million more homes over this Parliament, setting out further steps to achieve this, including an ambitious Planning White Paper and funding for critical infrastructure
- Giving local people the final say on council tax, giving them the power to veto excessive rises
- Potential measures to criminalise the act of trespassing when setting up an unauthorised encampment through a Police powers and protections bill
- Broadband legislation including a requirement that all new build homes have the infrastructure to support gigabit-capable connections
- Give communities more control over how investment is spent so that they can decide what is best for them, levelling up powers and investment in the regions across England and allowing each part of the country to decide its own destiny; publishing a White Paper setting out the strategy including further information on plans for full devolution across England, levelling up powers between Mayoral Combined Authorities, increasing the number of mayors and doing more devolution deals
- Conducting a fundamental review of business rates, recognising its role as a source of local authority income and consider input from the sector as part of the review
- An Environment Bill enshrining in law environmental principles and legally-binding targets, including for air quality, with the first Budget prioritising the environment
- Setting up a Constitution, Democracy and Rights Commission that will examine the broader aspects of the constitution in-depth and develop proposals to restore trust in our institutions and in how our democracy operates.

We will be writing to relevant ministers seeking meetings to discuss these and other matters in the New Year.

Borderlands Conference – Item A2

I attended the plenary part of the second Borderlands Conference.

It was illuminating yet in some ways disappointing.

It was disappointing as it's clear that the first tranche of projects still have hurdles to pass because of the need to satisfy the Treasuries of both the Scottish Government and the Westminster Government. From what I understand, the business cases for the range of projects have to be submitted to the Govts by the summer of 2020.

The more positive aspects reported were

- A cross-party willingness at all levels to make the unique nature of Borderlands Deal work, notwithstanding the two separate regimes on either side of the border
- The strategy is looking ahead in terms of up to twenty years and thoughts are already turning to the themes for the second and subsequent tranches
- The work on governance structures, again seemingly unique within Great Britain

I raised the point of consultation and involvement of English Local Councils and the Community Councils in Scotland. This theme was echoed by representatives from other smaller communities and the voluntary sector. From here on, I anticipate more consultation and involvement now that the Heads of Terms were signed off with the Govts (finally).

There is a real challenge for them in how to engage with the smaller businesses in Borderlands, given that in places there are no obvious groups for use as conduits.

I suspect of most interest for Member Councils are

- The work on Carlisle as a gateway - which may especially give opportunities in the west of our area
- The proposed conference centre in Berwick
- The digital rollout in collaboration with the higher education sector, opening up the prospect of reducing the need for daily three hours travel times to physical establishments and assisting in the retention of young families outside the more urban areas.

A useful attendance and definitely one to keep a watching brief on. As an aside, it was useful that the conference continued even though purdah meant there was no ministerial attendance.