

Northumberland Association of Local Councils

County Committee

18 November 2017

NALC Chief Officer's Report

1: Introduction

As an experiment, and in view of the number of items, I have divided this report into two sections

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

The Committee's views on this style would be welcomed please

Part A: Items for discussions and/or decisions

A1: Policy Developments

North of the Tyne Devolution – at the time of preparation of this report, I understand a formal announcement **may** precede the national Budget on 22 November 2018. As/if/when there is any further information, I shall advise the Committee.

A2: The 2018 Training Programme

- a. Included in the papers is the outline of a programme for 2018. It is ambitious and will stretch resources but takes into account the suggestions made by Members. The same events will be offered in various parts of the Associations' area and locations should be taken as very general at this stage.
- b. There are some exceptions where it is likely that external speakers will be required.
- c. The Committee is asked for views please**

A3: Standards

- i. Members of the Committee were circulated with an email on 20 September regarding an unexpected DCLG Consultation – roman numbering added to assist discussion

To members of the County Committee

- ii. Dear all,
- iii. The DCLG issued a consultation paper on Monday seeking views on adding criteria for the automatic disqualification of Councillors.
- iv. It is available via <https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/disqualification-criteria-for-councillors-and-mayors>
- v. There are two further broad categories proposed and I have place my initial thoughts below. In both cases disqualification is only for the period of the order and would not be retrospective.
- vi. 1: Sexual Offences
- vii. Certain types of sexual offence conviction offence mean an individual may be subject to Sexual Harm Prevention or Notification Orders – *SER's initial thought – this would seem acceptable in order to retain public confidence in the office of Councillor*
- viii. There is also a Sexual Risk Order which does not require a conviction or formal caution. The DCLG suggest this type of order would not mean an automatic disqualification. – *SER's initial thought – more difficult but on balance I agree with DCLG that disqualification should only follow a conviction.*
- ix. 2: Anti-Social Behaviour
- x. The proposal is that disqualification would occur if the anti-social behaviour sanction had been imposed by a court. *SER's initial thoughts – I am more uneasy about this given the range of orders reported in the press. Perhaps it would be better if the disqualification was a discretion left to the Court? In any event any disqualification should only follow a conviction or order of a Court.*
- xi. 3: Other Initial Thoughts
- xii. *It's the very practical one of how a Clerk/Council/Monitoring Officer/Returning Officer would check if an individual was subject to any of the above orders if an allegation was made by a third party?*
- xiii. A number of initial comments were made general on the lines suggested but pointing out the need for more public bodies to be included and the real practical issues for Councils.
- xiv. One additional point was how to protect Councillors from frivolous complaints and the failure of DCLG to recognise a need to protect Councillors from abuse particularly on social media.
- xv. The Committee are asked to confirm that a response should be made as above, with a copy to the national NALC**

A4: Review of Parliamentary Boundaries

- i. The revised proposals published on 17 October are a mixed blessing. The concept of constituencies crossing the Newcastle / Northumberland border has been dropped and Ponteland is no longer to be severed between constituencies.

ii. Choppington unfortunately will still be in two constituencies as the Council Council's Electoral Division boundaries no longer coincide with the parish boundary. The former is the basis for the parliamentary review.

iii It remains unclear whether these proposals, generated by a wish to reduce the size of the House of Commons to 600 MPs, will proceed.

Nevertheless, does the Committee wish to make any further representation?

A5: Exercise Border Reiver / Operation London Bridge

i. Some of the Northumberland Members will be aware that the County Council's conference on 5 October was affected by the national emergency planning exercise – (Exercise Border Reiver). I saw the County Council's Civil Contingencies Manager on 7 November as I consider an opportunity was lost by not involving local councils. I shall update the Committee on that discussion.

ii. The County Council's Emergency Planning Team are discussing contingency arrangements for Operation London Bridge with appropriate Councils

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

B1: Meetings attended and planned, and General Issues

- CPRE Northumberland – 28 Sept 2017
- Northumberland CC's Town & Parish Council Conference – 5 October 2017
- Meeting with the Larger Councils (precept over £100k) – 6 October 2017
- Meetings with County Council officers to follow up actions from the 5 October Conference – 26 October and 3 November 2017

B2: Issues raised by member councils

These have included

- Appointment of a new Clerk
- Standing Orders
- Planning
- Employment

- Relationships with constituents

B3 Past Training Programme

The April-September 2017 Training Programme concluded on 26 September 2017 with an event in Dinnington.

Details of individual sessions are included in the papers.

The use of Eventbrite continues to be well received with no difficulties being reported.

Out of 11 events held we had income of £832.31 and expenditure of £254.50 for hall hire. However, we are still awaiting an invoice from Bardon Mill for the training event held on 11th September plus the transparency fund has absorbed £50 of the hall hire costs. At the moment there is a surplus of £577.81 less Bardon Mill's invoice.

B4: Website and Transparency

Work is continuing but again I'd welcome any policies or forms which Member Councils have designed.

B5: The national NALC

Issues are covered in the report from Cllr Francis and I following the Annual Conference on 30 /31 October 2017

B6: Significant items sent to the County Committee

- 20 Sept – standards – see above
- 18 Oct – Parliamentary Constituencies

B7: Significant Items sent to Member Councils and the County Committee

- 12 Oct – National CX's AGM Slides
- 12 Oct – Details of Transparency Drop-in
- 12 Oct – Details of meeting with the County Council planners
- 18 Oct – AGM Draft Minutes
- 1 Nov – Precept Capping
- 8 Nov – EU Funding

Stephen Rickitt

NALC Chief Officer 8 November 2017

Northumberland ALC Co C'tee Chief Officer Report Nov 2017

<https://northumberlandalc.uk/>