

Northumberland Association of Local Councils

County Committee

19 January 2019

NALC Chief Officer's Report

Part A: Items for discussions and/or decisions

A1: Policy Developments

There was the usual flurry of announcements from Whitehall immediately before the Christmas break. Full details were in the Enews dated 8 January 2019

- The High Street Report
- Parks and Running Free
- Street Trees
- Single Use Carrier Bags
- Resources and Waste Strategy

A2: North of Tyne Devolution

The Committee may wish to pass its congratulations to Cllr Gregah Roughead (Berwick-upon Tweed) who has been elected as the Chair of the Overview & Scrutiny Committee, in his capacity as a County Councillor.

I have emailed the Monitoring Officer to formally invite the Mayor to our AGM in the hope it will be placed in the diary.

A3: Training

With my thanks for the comments on the initial programme, within the papers is a draft programme for 2019 events.

I am very pleased to say the Ombudsman's Office have agreed to lead a workshop on the common pitfalls which lead principal level council to have adverse reports. Although the Ombudsman has no current jurisdiction over Councils at our level, the provision is in the legislation and the ideas will inevitably assist our members in avoiding unnecessary time in dealing with complaints.

I would welcome the Committee's thoughts on whether to engage Steve Parkinson to deliver some longer and more in-depth events.

Details of his charges for the events are below

I suggest we see if there would be enough interest in a full day VAT course

- VAT for local councils (full day) £300
- Introduction to VAT (3 hours) £200
- Finance for Clerks (full day) £300
- Finance for councillors (2 hours) £150 if booked alongside another course
- Budgeting and financial control (3 hours) £200
- Contracts and procurement (3 hours) £200
- Transparency and audit (3 hours) £200
- The role of internal audit (2 hours) £150 if booked alongside another course
- Internal Auditor training (2 days) £700

All courses would be subject to travel and accommodation charges. Typically, you would be looking at £150 or so for a flight to Newcastle, onward travel and accommodation, although a shared trip with Cumbria or Durham would reduce that cost.

A4: The County Council's 2019/2020 Budget

Appendix Two is the text of responses sent to the County Council regarding

- Parking Charges – 19 December 2018
- Event Charges – 3 January 2019

A5: Mobile Phone Service Issues

Following the last Committee, I wrote to OFCOM regarding the fears expressed concerning repairs in our area.

OFCOM responded as follows

Ofcom Reference: 00649836

28 December 2018

Dear Mr Rickitt

Thank you for your email sent to the Corporation Secretary at Ofcom dated 19 December 2018. Your correspondence has been

forwarded to the Consumer Contact Team and I have been asked to respond.

I understand from your email that members of your local community have raised concerns about the time taken to repair faults on the masts in the area and the effect this is having on coverage.

Ofcom expects providers to resolve any network faults within their control as quickly as possible to minimise the impact on consumers. We would also expect providers to ensure that customers are provided with accurate advice and any queries are dealt with in a professional manner. Ofcom regularly publishes information on the number of complaints received against each provider, and this puts further pressure on companies to provide a high standard of service. Further details can be found using the following link: <https://www.ofcom.org.uk/about-ofcom/latest/features-and-news/telecoms-pay-tv-complaints-q1-2018>

While I appreciate you would like Ofcom to look into this I should explain that our remit does not allow us to become involved in individual cases.

Any information provided is logged onto our system for industry monitoring purposes and if we identify evidence that a service provider is in breach of our regulations, we may investigate and take any action that we deem appropriate.

Yours sincerely

Consumer Contact Team

A6: The national NALC Annual Conference

The national NALC are holding their conference on 28 and 29 October 2019. It is to be in Milton Keynes again, which probably means that two days accommodation is required. The Association was not represented at the 2018 Conference because of the costs involved.

Should the Association send a representative(s) to the 2019 Conference?

A7: Safeguarding and Jessica Scam Syndrome (JSS)

I met Karen Wright, NCC Strategic Safeguarding manager, this morning. She is anxious to get links to organisations within communities and hence my approach was both opportune and welcome.

She has already provided me with the following for the Enews

Safeguarding Adults

If you are concerned about a vulnerable adult who is at risk of neglect or abuse in Northumberland, please contact **OneCall: 01670 536 400**

To find out more information/advice about how to report neglect or abuse, and the work of the Safeguarding Adults Board, please see the [Safeguarding Adults website](#).

I have suggested to Iain Hedley that she might be a useful speaker at the conference later this year, following the success of Liz Morgan in 2018.

We discussed JSS and associated scams – fish selling is one I am picking up – and I offered to ask our member councils for their views on whether this is a problem.

All-in-all, a useful meeting and should enable a greater range of information we can give to Councils as they may well be the first to pick up on individuals at risk.

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

B1: Meetings attended and planned, and General Issues

- SLCC Northumberland Branch AGM
- Karen Wright – see above

B2: Issues raised by member councils

These have included

- Co-option processes
- Data Protection
- Planning
- Standards
- Vexatious FoI Requesters
- Village Greens

B3 2018 Training Programme

The outcome is shown as Appendix One

B4: Items sent to the Chairmen and Clerks of Member Councils

- Financial Advice – 6 December 2018
- Salary Scales – 11 December 2018
- Social Media - 2 January 2019

- Royal Garden Party – 3 January 2019
- Newcastle and Northumberland Local Council of the Year – 9 January 2019

B5: Press Reports

None to report

Stephen Rickitt

NALC Chief Officer

10 January 2019

Appendix One – 2018 Training Outcomes

	Event	Location	Date	Numbers Booked	Numbers Attended
1	Audit	Bardon Mill	12 April	8	7
2	Audit	Belford	16 April	13	13
3	Data Protection	Bedlington Station	19 April	9	9
4	Data Protection	Longhoughton	23 April	15	15
5	Data Protection	Bardon Mill	25 April	10	10
6	Audit	Bedlington Station	8 May	2	4
7	Audit & Data Protection	Pegswood	12 May	19	18
8	Intro to Local Councils	Powburn	11 June	8	8
9	Intro to Local Councils	Bedlington Station	14 June	9	9
10	Intro to Local Councils	Powburn	20 June	6	6
11	Intro to Local Councils	Dinnington	5 July	1	Cancelled
12	H'ways and RoWs	Wylam	4 Sept	15	14
13	H'ways and RoWs	Powburn	11 Sept	7	7

14	H'ways and RoWs	Bedlington Station	17 Sept	9	8
15	Update	Alnwick	23 Oct	1	Cancelled
16	Update	Newton and Bywell	24 Oct	11	9
17	Update	Bedlington Station	28 Nov	3	3
18	CiLCA	Morpeth	30 Nov	9	8
19	Social Media	Morpeth	1 Dec	16	16
20	Finance	Morpeth	11 Dec	11	10
	Totals			182	174

Appendix 2 – The County Council’s Budget

Proposed Budget 2019/2020 - Parking Charges

This consultation was considered by the NALC County Committee when it last met.

The Committee discussed the County Council’s proposed imposition of parking charges in tourist locations and at railway stations. In discussions based on experiences the Chief Officer was asked to contact the County Council drawing attention to

- The displacement of parking from car parks to streets and other areas
- Fears that a daily charge of £3.00 at stations would be more than petrol costs to commute to Tyneside, thereby increasing congestion
- The consequential problems for residents and businesses through the lack of enforcement action against unlawfully parked vehicles
- The need to share surpluses with Parish, Town or Community Councils in whose areas charges may be imposed (noting the statutory restrictions on the use of charge and penalty income)

Event Charges

Thank you again and I have consulted leading Members of the NALC County Committee as our next meeting is not until 19 January 2019. The Committee may wish to supplement these comments.

The Association is concerned at the effect such a policy will have on the range of events in communities across the county.

Smaller events are often organised at a very local level by volunteers from the community with no charges being made for participation. Our fear is that either the policy will deter events from being organised or events will be held without seeking closure orders and thus creating danger for participants.

Whilst charges may be appropriate for some of the large events with entry fees and/or sponsorship, the application to the very local events will be counter-productive and work against the work to increase community engagement and cohesion.

The larger free events will also be put at risk as these are usually very tightly budgeted. You refer to sponsorship but our perceptions are that the available pool of grants / sponsorship is diminishing.

In practical terms, how will costs be recovered if the organisers are a group of volunteers and is the saving really worth the collection costs and problems involved?