

# **Northumberland Association of Local Councils**

## **County Committee**

**8 June 2019**

### **NALC Chief Officer's Report**

#### **Part A: Items for discussions and/or decisions**

##### A1: Policy Developments

Brexit seems to be absorbing the energies of Govt. The result is that few policy initiatives have emerged from Whitehall.

##### A2: North of Tyne Devolution

Janie Driscoll was elected as the Mayor of the Combined Authority. I have already written to request a meeting and to confirm the invitation to the AGM. I am delighted to report that he has accepted. The Combined Authority's Cabinet has its annual meeting on 4 June and I hope to be present. I will update the Committee on any outcomes.

##### A3: Training

The initial programme has now been sent to all Member Councils and the first session was in Hepscott on 8 April (on Audit) attended by 4 clerks.

I have conducted one individual Council session.

The VAT session will be on Thursday 26 September and presented by Steve Parkinson.

I am in contact with the Open Spaces Society regarding a potential session on managing common land and village greens.

##### A4: Borrowing Approvals

There has been a rise in the number of applications for borrowing approval from the MHCLG, usually in connection with housing projects. The national NALC have placed essential reading on their website in the Development Tools Subsection [log-in required]

What is very clear is the need to undertake extensive consultation with parishioners before submitting an application, agenda items and publication of the minutes are not sufficient. MHCLG also expect the

applicant Council to have considered a worst-case scenario, for example, expected rental income does not materialise or is significantly lower than anticipated.

#### A5: Data Protection Fees

Legislation has now provided that a Councillor is not charged a fee for “registering” as a data controller in their capacity as a Councillor or prospective councillor. This means that a Councillor who retains personal information such as constituency casework will not have to pay the £40 /35 fee. A fee will be payable if other information, for example from a personal business, is held.

#### A6: Crime

Mitford Parish Council have expressed concern at the level of resources available to Northumbria Police to tackle crime in rural areas, particularly given the significant rise in the police precept for 2019/2020.

Mitford PC has suggested that representatives of the County Committee may wish to seek a meeting with Dame Vera Baird, the Police and Crime Commissioner, to discuss this issue.

Since this request, her retirement has been announced. In these circumstances, it may be better to await the outcome of the by-election for a new PPC.

East Bedlington Parish Council have reported an upsurge in vandalism and anti-social behaviour in recent months and wondered if other Councils have also noticed an increase?

In these circumstances, it may be wise to carry-out a survey of our Members to see the extent of the problem before seeking a meeting.

The Committee is asked for their views.

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

#### B1: Meetings attended

- Choppington Parish Council – 10 April
- The East Tynedale Forum – 25 April
- Rob Murfin – 21 May

A family bereavement severely curtailed my time during May and as a result my jury service now starts on 1 July for two weeks.

## B2: Issues raised by member councils

These have included

- Co-Option
- The six-month non-attendance rule
- Honorary Freeman
- VAT Questions – to Steve Parkinson
- Completion of the AGAR
- Scam calls apparently from HMRC
- Social media comments by and against Local Councils/Councillors

## B3: Items sent to the Chairmen and Clerks of Member Councils

- Meeting with County Council Officers – 27 March 2019
- Governance and Accountability (the new JPAG Guidance) – 2 April 2019
- Northumberland & Newcastle Local Councillor Census – 9 April 2019
- Audit (further information including a step-by-step guide) – 10 April 2019
- Data Protections Fees – see A5 above – 16 April 2019
- National NALC Legal Briefing – 30 April 2019
- VE Day 75 – 8 May 2019
- Northumberland National Park's Draft Local Plan – 8 May 2019
- Northumberland & Newcastle Local Councillor Census (Reminder)– 9 May 2019
- NALC Events – including the VAT Course – 9 May 2019
- Operation London Bridge – 21 May 2019

#### B4: 2019/2020 Subscriptions and Website Fees

As at 0900 on 29 May 2019 (figures rounded to pound)

	<b>Anticipated- £</b>	<b>Received to date - £</b>	<b>Paid by number of Councils</b>
Subscriptions	51176	40362	101/147
Website	4125	2775	37/55
Local Council Review	1179	618	

Cheques are being received each day and I anticipate these figures will have risen by the date of the meeting. It is clear that more Councils are moving to internet banking which means that payments are received more quickly than in the past.

#### B5: Website Analytics

Included in the papers are details for the Jan-March 2019 period for the website and parishes portal. Councils using the portal have been sent a report for their individual websites.

#### B6: Press Reports

None to draw to the attention of the Committee.

Stephen Rickitt

NALC Chief Officer

29 May 2019