

Northumberland Association of Local Councils

Meeting of the County Committee at 10.15 am on Saturday 14 January 2017 at the Storey Park Community Centre, Morpeth

Present:

Councillors Dalton, Dobson, Forster, Francis, Hood, Horn, Parker, Rawlings, Reynolds, Thompson, Todd (Chairman in the Chair), Wallace, Wood and Woodard

Mrs M Anderton

T Kirsop (Northumberland County Council) – Items 1-7.3 only

SE Rickitt (NALC Chief Officer)

1: Welcome, apologies for absence, changes to membership and declarations of interest

1.1 Councillor Todd took the Chair and welcomed colleagues to the meeting.

1.2 The following apologies were noted:

Councillors Barrell, Butler, Potts and Seymour, and Ms Turner

2: Committee Membership

2.1 The Chief Officer reported that there had been no expressions of interest from the areas currently not represented on the Committee. It was agreed that invitations for co-option should be extended to other Councillors, especially from small rural Councils. **Action SER**

2.2 The Chairman reminded members of the Committee to consider whether one would volunteer to sit as the NALC representative on the CAN Board. **Action All**

3: Minutes of the meeting held on 12 November 2016

3.1 The minutes of the previous meeting were approved as a true record and signed by the Chairman.

3.2 Members of the Committee were supplied with copies of the ARCH annual report.

4: Financial Issues

4.1 The Committee noted and approved the transactions as shown on the extract of the bank statement. (a copy is attached to the signed minutes). The Chief Officer was asked to include the explanation of transaction codes in future reports. **Action SER**

4.2 The Committee asked that further final attempts be made to contact Shilbottle Parish Council. The Committee were advised that one larger Council may re-join the Association which was welcomed. **Action DF, TH and SER**

4.3 The Committee were advised that Margaret Tweddell has now received the authorisation for internet banking from Lloyds Bank.

7: Northumberland County Council Issues

7.1 With the consent of the Committee, this item was brought forward. Mr Kirsop, the County Council's Community Regeneration Manager, was welcomed to the meeting.

7.2 Elections

- a. Mr Kirsop recognised the concerns being expressed at the proposals for an increased share of the costs of contested elections to be borne by Northumberland's Local Councils
- b. He explained that the proposed increases from those charged in 2013 were mainly in connection with the costs of polling station hire. The staff costs (presiding officer etc.) would be met by the County Council.
- c. The Committee welcomed this clarification and in discussion made the following point that some stations were likely to be unavailable in May and the Committee agreed to assist the Elections Office in identifying these. Members urged that the Elections Team make use of Local Councils' *local intelligence*.
- d. The Committee were pleased that no charges will be made for uncontested elections resulting from the March nominations.
- e. Concern was expressed over the proposals to recover the administration costs of uncontested elections in a second round when Councils have an insufficient number of valid nominations to form a quorum. The Committee asked that representations be made as this might adversely affect the very small Councils already

struggling. It was agreed that if such second rounds were needed, then the Association would see how it might assist particularly with the display of formal notices. **Action SER**

7.3 Other Northumberland Issues

- Mr Kirsop explained that the Town and Parish Liaison Working Group meeting, scheduled for 4 January 2017, would be rescheduled for March.
- He confirmed that participating Councils could now choose which of their Elected Members would attend the Group. The NALC Chief Officer and SLCC representatives were invited to attend to assist the Group.

The Chairman thanked Mr Kirsop for attending the meeting.

At this point Mr Kirsop left the meeting.

5: Chief Officer's Report

5.1 The Committee considered the report of the Chief Officer, a copy of which is attached to the signed minutes.

5.2 Elections – see above

5.3 National NALC Affiliation Fees

- a) The Committee were concerned at the complexity of the "Smooth Transition Scheme" but generally expressed no strong preference between that and the current scheme provided a maximum cap was retained.
- b) Councillor Francis (the national NALC representative) indicated his view that the majority of the National Council would seek to retain the current system.
- c) He suggested that the Association take the opportunity to strongly repeated its view that a system based on electorate took no account of ability to pay the national fees. With the publication of Council Tax data, a more equitable method would be to use the *Band D Equivalent* as the basis for affiliation fees.
- d) This was agreed by the Committee. **Action SER**

5.4 The Training Programme

The provisional programme was noted and Members asked to provide any further comments to the Chief Officer. **Action All**

5.5 Committee Vice-Chairman

Members were asked to contact the Chairman direct if interested. The Committee agreed that at least one Vice-Chairman was needed. **Action All**

5.6 Other items in the report were noted

6: Newcastle Issues

6.1 Councillor Forster advised the Committee of his resignation as a parish councillor after 22 years of office and 14 years on the Committee. The Chairman thanked Councillor Forster for his service, endorsed by all present.

6.2 Councillor Thompson is assisting the Chief Officer in arranging a meeting of member Councils from Newcastle.

6.3 Concern was expressed at the potential mobile library closures and how these would adversely affect the elderly in particular.

6.4 The Committee were advised that member Councils in Newcastle are generally carrying a number of vacancies and this should form part of the discussion at the meeting mentioned above.

7: Northumberland Issues (continued)

Elections and Town & Parish Liaison Working Group - see above

7.4 Planning

- a. Concern was expressed at the late and short consultation from the County Council regarding changes to pre-application consultations. Members continue to fear that some County Council officers do not appreciate the difficulties in properly engaging with communities.
- b. Councillor Rawlings drew attention to the volume of applications being received by Ponteland Town Council especially over the Christmas period., generating over 3000 pages of documentation.
- c. He also was concerned that extensions of time to respond given to the Town Council had not been noted on the case file displayed on

the County Council's website, causing confusion amongst parishioners.

- d. The Committee discussed their experiences including
- Problems in inputting in the negotiation of section 106 planning obligations, and the fear that some funds might have to be returned to developers
 - The perception that some developers were deliberately submitting applications at holiday periods
 - The pressure imposed by Central Government imposing very short timescales for determining planning applications
 - Failures by local planning authorities to seek consent for their own development
- e. Councillor Wallace suggested that all Local Councils should consider creating lists of matters they might wish to see in future Planning Obligations so they would be ready to respond to individual consultations. The Chief Officer will draw attention in a forth-coming Enews.
- f. Similar issues also exist within the City Council's area, with particular concern being expressed over the inclusion of *Green Spaces* within new developments. Although these would be initially maintained by the developer, there seemed to be an expectation that Local Councils would take responsibility in the medium/longer term. The Committee felt that *management companies* comprising the occupiers of new developments should be responsible for their maintenance
- g. The Chief Officer was asked to contact the Local Planning Authorities to set out these views. **Action SER**

8: County Committee Member's Issues

A Member raised the appropriateness of an HR Committee meeting in certain circumstances without the clerk being present and then further about the role of the clerk more generally in HR matters - managing the tension between the responsibilities of a clerk to advise/clerk HR meetings and his/her status as an employee. The Member wondered if this was a problem experienced by other Councils? The Councillor will speak direct to the Chief Officer.

9: National ALC Issues

Councillor Francis had provided a written report which was adopted with thanks. The Committee offered their congratulations on his election to the Policy and Smaller Councils Committees.

10: Any Other Business

10.1 Councillor Horn reported that Councillor Robert Arckless had been awarded the MBE in the New Year’s Honours List for his service as a Councillor at all levels of local government including on Amble Town Council. The Committee offered their congratulations. **Action SER**

10.2 In closing the meeting, Councillor Todd thanked Morpeth Town Council for continuing to allow the Committee to meet without charging for the Hall.

10.3 Councillor Wallace asked that attention is drawn to LEADER funding for Local Council projects as he was concerned that some Local Councils may still be unaware of their existence. **Action SER**

The meeting closed at 11.45 pm.

Confirmed as a true record

and signed by the Chairman..... Date.....

DRAFTING NOTE - REPORTS TO BE ADDED