

Northumberland Association of Local Councils

Meeting of the County Committee at 10.15 am on Saturday 23 June 2018 at the Storey Park Community Centre, Morpeth

Present:

Councillors Barrell, Dawson, Fenwick, Francis, Gillanders, Hedley Hood, Hogg, Parks, Peden, Potts, Price, Pringle, Sambrook, Wallace (Chairman in the chair), Wood and Woodard

Mrs M Anderton

Ms G Turner (Hon. Treasurer)

SE Rickitt (NALC Chief Officer)

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

1.1 Members of the Committee stood in silence as a mark of respect for

- The late Peter Angus – a former Chairman of this Association as well as Vice-Chairman of the national Association
- The late George Askew – a serving member of the County Committee
- The late Philip Brooks – a former President and Chairman of this Association
- The late Shiela Campbell MBE – a long-serving former member of Ponteland Town Council

1.2 The following apologies were noted:

Councillors Dunn, Rook, Roughead, Stanners, Tebbutt, Thompson and Varley

2: Committee Membership and Appointments

Cllr Gerry Price (Prudhoe Town Council) was co-opted onto the Committee to replace Cllr Gilmore.

3: Minutes of the meeting held on 24 March 2018

3.1 The minutes of the previous meeting were approved as a true record and signed by the Chairman with the correction of the date at the head of page one.

3.2 The following issues were raised

- Northern Powergrid no longer have a response team for outages within the greater part of Northumberland. Repair teams have to be called out from home. Members are concerned that this will delay responses and the Chief Officer was asked to seek clarification.

Action SER

- Cllr Wood advised that Colin Hall (Environment Agency) wished to speak to parishes or other community groups. The Chief Officer will circulate his details to Member Councils and see if he would like a stand at the Annual Meeting. **Action SER**
- Members asked about the production of an Officer Who's Who by the County Council. Cllr Hedley (as a County officer) advised the Committee that a new edition should be available by the autumn conference.

4: Financial Issues

The Committee noted and adopted the financial summary. A copy is attached to the signed minutes. The Committee were advised that as at 20 June, 73 Councils had paid their 2018/2019 subscriptions and website charge, out of a total membership of 147 Councils.

5: Annual Report and Annual Meeting

5.1 Members made some minor suggestions for amendments to the draft report which was then agreed for distribution to Member Councils. **Action SER**

5.2 The Committee endorsed "The Borderlands Inclusive Growth Initiative" as the theme of the 2019 Annual Meeting. A note of the Dumfries Conference on 18 June had been circulated to the Committee. [A copy is in the appendix for ease of reference] The Chief Officer will continue his efforts to arrange a lead speaker. **Action SER**

6: Chief Officer's Report

6.1 The Committee considered and adopted the report of the Chief Officer with the further comments below. [A copy is attached to the signed minutes]

6.2 Attention was drawn to the very recent national NALC note on the implications of the Ledbury Town Council judgment which will be drawn to the attention of Member Councils. **Action SER**

6.3 The Committee were informed that Lawyers in Local Government (who represent Monitoring Officers) and SOLACE (who represent principal councils' Chief Executives) have both made submissions to the Committee for Standards in Public Life seeking strengthening of the sanctions available for Councillors who breach their Code of Conduct.

6.4 The Committee agreed that the Chief Officer could sit on an archives consultative committee if invited by the County Records Service.

6.5 Members were pleased to note the attendance at recent training/updating events and welcomed the idea of offering bespoke training for individual councils at a standard charge of £75.00. **Action SER**

6.6 The Chief Officer reported on his meeting with Guy Opperman MP the previous day when he had provided a briefing on the Association's work. He had taken the opportunity to ask Mr Opperman about the review of parliamentary constituency boundaries but Mr Opperman was unable to provide any information about whether the reduction to 600 MPs would proceed. The Chief Officer was asked to clarify the current proposals and circulate details to members of the Committee. **Action SER**

7: Newcastle Issues

The Chief Officer reported on the proposed briefing scheduled for 5 July 2018

8: Northumberland Issues

8.1 Member Councils had been circulated with a note of the Town & Parish Liaison Working Group held on 3 May 2018. [A copy is in the appendix for ease of reference]

8.2 The Committee authorised the Chief Officer, in consultation with the Chairman and Vice-Chairman) to respond to the County Council's consultation on the draft Local Plan if there were issues of general interest for Northumberland Member Councils. **Action SER**

8.3 Cllrs Hood, Potts and Wallace and the Chief Officer had attended a meeting with the County Council on 14 June 2018 to discuss issues arising from the count in 2017 and lessons to be learnt for 2021. A note

had been sent to all Member Councils. [A copy is in the appendix for ease of reference]

8.4 The County Council had requested ideas for the speakers at its Autumn Town & Parish Council Conference. Cllr Francis and the Chief Officer had heard the impressive presentation by Liz Morgan (The Director of Public Health) at the CAN Spring Conference and Members endorsed the suggestion that she be invited to lead discussion on what Local Councils could do to reduce calls on the NHS. **Action SER**

9: County Committee Member's Issues

Cllr Woodard expressed concern at the apparent continuing failure of County Planning officers to give proper weight to adopted Neighbourhood Plans. Other Committee Members expressed similar concerns. One issue raised was an apparent inability of the County Council to identify previous Borough and District Councils' Design Guides when they had been formally adopted as Supplementary Planning Guidance. A further issue was the achievement (or otherwise) of planning targets being met by the County Council's Local Area Councils. The Chief Officer will investigate and report to the Committee. **Action SER**

10: National ALC Issues

10.1 Councillor Francis reported on the national Policy Committee held earlier in the week which had discussed

- Local Planning Authorities and Inspectors not giving proper weight to Neighbourhood Plans (see also item 9 above)
- Competition issues being raised by commercial transport companies when communities are providing community transport schemes
- The successful lobbying over Data Protection Officers and GDPR which lead to a recognition of the need to have links with counterparts in other parts of the UK.

10.2 The Committee considered the national NALC's discussion paper *Shaping our future: A Big Conversation* and endorsed the theme of the Chief Officer's suggested comments as amplified by the comments from Stocksfield Parish Council. **Action SER**

11: National NALC Representative

The national NALC now appoint members to their various committees every two years and any new representative would not step into the same seats as their predecessor. Cllr Francis is a member of both the Policy and Smaller Councils Committees (chairing the latter) and the Committee agreed that the national representative should be elected every second

year by the County Committee (the next election being in the Summer of 2019).

12: The Association's Constitution

Following informal consultation with Member Councils, it was agreed to recommend the changes to the Annual Meeting. [A copy is attached to the signed minutes]

13: Newcastle and Northumberland Council of the Year

13.1 The Chairman and Chief Officer were disappointed in having to report there had been no entries. The Committee agreed that the initiative was worth pursuing and authorised the Chairman and Chief Officer to relaunch the competition for 2019. **Action AW & SER**

13.2 The Committee were pleased to offer congratulations to Hexham Town Council on achieving Foundation Status under the Local Council Award Scheme

14: Any other urgent business

None raised

15: Date of next meeting – Saturday 8 September 2018

Further meetings in 2018 were noted as

- 29 September 2018 – AGM – The Sill, Bardon Mill
- 17 Nov 2018

The suggested programme for 2019 set out below was agreed with a request that the June 2019 meeting be earlier in the month if possible and that one meeting would be at The Pegswood Hub

- 19 January 2019
- 23 March 2019
- 22 June 2019
- 7 September 2019
- 28 September 2019 – AGM
- 16 November 2019

The meeting closed at 1200

Confirmed as a true record and signed by the Chairman.....

Date.....

Appendix – emails referred to – for ease of reference**Item 5.2 – Borderlands Deal**

With the agreement of Cllr Wallace, I attended the conference in Dumfries on 18 June 2018.

The following are my impressions as there was little by way of hard detail of the projects being considered.

Positive Impressions

- Although the Scottish Secretary of State had been called to London, I got the clear understanding that the Deal is supported by both governments and their respective Treasuries who are participating in the discussions.
- The bids are to be submitted in July with the aim of having Heads of Terms agreed in time for both Government's Budget announcements in late 2018.
- Whilst the projects have to be capital rather than revenue, it became clear that a project could be a theme of smaller projects rather than a single "big ticket" item.
- The Borderlands Region will become a marketing tool for tourism, attracting investment and encouraging business & people to remain.
- Both Governments want to avoid causing further problems by just working with communities & businesses in the Central Belt (of Scotland) or the Manchester-Leeds axis.

Work still to do

- The running seems to be made at present by the Scottish elements, especially that the creation of a South of Scotland Enterprise Agency has meant their engagement with communities seems ahead of engagement south of the border (an example is 26 Town Hall meetings).
- I gained an impression that the problem here of the lack of affordable housing (rent or buy) is not seen as the same north of

the border. Other major problems are common – examples are losing skilled young people to the Central Belt or London.

- The use of Local Councils as potential delivery partners, with tax-raising powers, is an English concept as the Scottish Community Councils are funded via grants from their principal councils.

Other Issues Raised

- Broadband – coverage is seen as important but also there is a recognised need to have new and existing business make more &/or better use of the internet. Just increasing coverage of high-speed links will not significantly improve productivity.
- Land use – indications were given that existing rural land uses may need encouragement to change (but I heard no thoughts on what to).
- A need to combat the automatic “claymores and kilts” marketing of tourism to the Highlands & Islands, ignoring the very different and shared heritage of the Borderlands, and thus drawing tourists south once they have been to Edinburgh or north when been to York.
- The need to use individual’s heritage as a market for tourists.
- Delivery of education will have to change – perhaps moving to more courses where students work part-time at the same time as studying.
- Governance of the Deal is recognised as a real problem.

Miscellaneous

- Borderlands has a larger land mass than Wales
- To assist Whitehall, they have been told that the region would stretch from London to Paris.
- Regional productivity is £6300 per head less than the UK average at a time when the working age regional population is declining.

Personal Conclusion

Whilst disappointing that there was not more detail of actual projects, the degree of reported commitment from the two Governments is very encouraging.

Location of the conference may have meant greater participation from Scottish bodies, but there does seem to be a need to promote the Deal within England.

The opportunities for the involvement of Member Local Councils remains vague at this stage, but if projects are to be sustainable, there should be scope for such a role – if a Council/group of Councils so wish.

Item 8.1 Town & Parish Liaison Working Group

A number of the County Committee attended this and I would welcome any significant items I may have missed in the summary below please.

In no particular order of importance

1. Bus Timetables – 35 PC's have expressed interest and NCC are in the process of getting keys distributed. If other PC's wish to participate, they should contact Neil Easton please - his email address is neil.easton@northumberland.gov.uk
2. Street lights – NCC will prepare an update for placement in the Enews (if not sent direct to PC's)
3. Parking in Villages – NCC are happy to talk direct to individual PC's about any problems in their village. I suggest that Cllr Sanderson (as the Cabinet Member) is emailed – glen.sanderson@northumberland.gov.uk
4. Parking in Towns – Cllr Wallace asked about meetings with other towns, especially in SE Northumberland and again Cllr Sanderson is happy to meet to discuss individual issues if he is contacted by the Councils affected.

5. Parking enforcement was raised and we asked for more information for distribution to Parish Councils – which is below – PCN is a Parking Contravention Notice

Further to a request at last week's meeting for information on the number of Enforcement Officer posts, and statistics on PCN's issued, please see information below received from the Performance & Processing Officer, Parking Services:

The number of CEOs in the structure last year was 16 CEOs and 2 Senior CEOs, this increased to 17 CEOs and 2 Senior CEOs in October 17. We rarely operate at full capacity however, and continue to actively recruit into any vacancies that we have.

The PCNs issued last year were:

	No of PCNs	On-Street	Off-Street
Total 2017/2018	19851	10319	9532

6. Cemeteries – I raised the NALC email sent to all Member Councils. NCC asked that I liaise with them to ensure the list of local authority cemeteries on their website is correct and they offered to let PCs attend a course they are organising for their in-house staff on this topic.
7. The Hierarchy of Highways – all Councils were sent an email in late April asking for views on the proposed hierarchy for maintenance. We raised two issues – whether the primary use could be shown against the road (i.e. was it for tourism or employment etc.) and whether NCC could let PCs know the existing status or at least identify those roads with a proposed significant change in status. There was some NCC officer reluctance to commit to providing either element. I sent an email to Member Parishes last week.
8. North of Tyne Devolution – NECA has now formally agreed to the split and the issue is now with the new Secretary of State at MHCLG. There is hope that the new interim authority will be established in early July. I asked for confirmation that NCC will be supporting the Association's

request for a parish council seat on the Overview & Scrutiny Committee of the new authority. This is yet to be considered by NCC's Cabinet.

9. The Borderlands Initiative – a very interesting presentation and we requested a briefing note for PCs. The President and I thought this might be a suitable theme for the AGM in September at The Sill.
10. The Local Plan – NCC have published the updated Scheme which is at <http://www.northumberland.gov.uk/NorthumberlandCountyCouncil/media/Planning-and-Building/planning%20policy/Local%20Plan/Local-Development-Scheme-2018-2021-April-2018.pdf> We requested that PCs be emailed details.
11. The Plan Period will now be 2016-2036
12. Drafts of the proposed plan will be going to their Committees in June. I will circulate links when I spotted them.

Item 8.3 Northumberland Elections

On 14 June 2018 Cllr Wallace (Chairman of the County Committee, Cllrs Hood and Potts (Vice-Chairmen of the County Committee) and I met Cllr Roughead (Chair of the County Council's Town and Parish Liaison Working Group), Will Booth (Elections Manager) and Iain Hedley (Community Regeneration Officer).

The purpose was to consider the issues raised by the 2017 Elections and particularly the Local Council count being on Saturday in Hexham with a view to suggesting improvements for 2021.

1: The Count

The 2017 Local Council (and County Council) counts had been held in Hexham with a desire to moving the count around the county at each election cycle to alleviate perception of geographic inequality due to them always being based in the south-east of the county.

Timing of the County Council 2021 count is under discussion but resources mean that the Local Council election count will ideally be on Saturday.

The NALC team appreciated the thought behind the 2017 location but drew attention to the travel distances for those involved in the count, both staff and candidates. Our team indicated a preference for a more central location for the Saturday count. After discussion the preferred location for the Local Council count in terms of geographic accessibility was County Hall as the relocated School to be built on the old fire station may assist in providing accommodation and parking problems would be mitigated. Will Booth noted that any viable option within the south east will be considered with reference to the essential requirements for a venue to accommodate a count on the scale of local elections in Northumberland. The County Hall site will be added to the list of options.

Once the number of contested elections is known, NCC will consider producing a timeline for each count on a "not before X AM/PM" basis as this would reduce the waiting times for those Councils being counted later in the day.

2: Process

All present wish to provide a greater degree of information for prospective candidates and it was agreed that both NCC and NALC would undertake a joint series of information events during 2020.

NCC will be preparing a communications protocol for the 2021 elections and gratefully accepted our offer to comment on the draft in due course, likely to be during 2019.

3: Share of Costs

There are no current plans to alter the basis of sharing costs at joint elections. NALC asked for confirmation as soon as possible to enable Local Councils to consider starting to build up funds. It was noted that the share of costs is driven by the Northumberland Town and Parish Charter, therefore any future revision of this document may have an implication for the future financial agreement. In the absence of this, the Returning Officer has no plans to revisit the shared funding arrangements.

4: Dormant Councils

It was agreed that these were not a priority for action by either NCC or NALC. It is, however, desirable from the NCC perspective to find some future means of addressing this ongoing historic issue. NCC will keep NALC abreast of any future developments in this respect.

5: The 2019 Newcastle Elections

Just to advise Member Councils in Newcastle, that I have contacted the Elections Team at the Civic Centre with the view of starting briefings for Local Councils.

DRAFT