

## **Northumberland Association of Local Councils**

### **Meeting of the County Committee at 10.15 am on Saturday 24 January 2018 at the Storey Park Community Centre, Morpeth**

Present:

Councillors Francis, Hedley, Hood (Vice-Chairman in the Chair), Parks, Peden, Pringle, Potts, C. Taylor (substituting for Cllr Hogg), Tebbutt, Varley and Woodard

Mrs M Anderton

Ms G Turner (Hon. Treasurer)

SE Rickitt (NALC Chief Officer)

Ian Clough – The County Council’s Civil Contingencies manager (who left after item 3)

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

1.1 Cllr Hood took the Chair and welcomed colleagues to the meeting.

1.2 The following apologies were noted:

Councillors Askew, Barrell, Dawson, Dunn, Gillanders, Rook, Roughead, Sambrook, Stanners, Thompson, Wallace and Wood

Best wishes were extended to all those unable to attend through illness of either themselves or members of their family.

#### 2: Committee Membership and Appointments

The Committee agreed to encourage substitutes if a member of the Committee was unable to attend a particular meeting.

#### 3: Civil Contingencies

3.1 The Vice-Chairman welcomed Mr Clough to the meeting.

3.2 Mr Clough explained that the invitation to attend had grown out of Exercise Border Reiver which had clashed with the County Council’s Town and Parish Council Conference in October. He was briefly able to explain

that the exercise had been a Home Office led Counter Terror exercise on both sides of the Scottish border. The exercise report had not yet been released but Mr Clough was able to assure the Committee that the need to communicate with local elected members was an issue that the County Council had raised in the exercise debrief.

3.2 Mr Clough then turned to the more general aspects of communication during an emergency (of whatever nature). He agreed to explore sharing briefings sent to County Councillors with Local Councils, emphasising that experience shows there is not the time to tailor different messages or the audience. He was examining this with the County Council's new Head of Communications.

3.3 It was likely that electronic means would be used and mentioned the use of Twitter and Facebook during the recent snow, although it is recognised that all means to communicate are required including issuing traditional statements to the media.

3.4 Mr Clough will be providing the Chief Officer with links to various feeds and websites for passing to Local Councils. Mention was made of the "Your Northumbria" facility offered by Northumbria Police and this will be included with the list.

3.5 During the discussion with the Committee the following points were also raised

- Community Flooding Initiatives – meetings were now very infrequent as the Environment Agency have appointed a Community Engagement Officer who works in the Civil Contingencies Team for part of the week
- Power cuts and vulnerable residents – it was agreed that Councils should be reminded of the ability for vulnerable parishioners to register with Northern Powergrid and British Gas for expedited assistance in the event of power supply failures
- The Civil Contingencies Team continue to rely on village and other community buildings for use as emergency rest centres, a link that is valued by the County Council
- The recent events in Salisbury are being closely followed by the partners within the the Northumbria Local Resilience Forum to see what lessons there may be for our area.

3.6 Mr Clough was thanked by the Vice-Chairman for a useful and informative discussion.

#### 4: Minutes of the meeting held on 20 January 2018

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

#### 5: Financial Issues

5.1 The Honorary Treasurer reported that the income and expenditure from sales of *Local Council Review* would be shown in the summary which would commence on 1 April 2018.

5.2 The Chief Officer reported that one of the three Councils previously in arrears had made a BACS payment the previous day, the second had assured that a cheque had been signed and was en route and the third had special issues and was working with the Chief Officer. Members were gratified to receive this update.

#### 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 consultation on the NPPF and the Committee agreed to seek specific reference to the need to consult local councils particularly in pre-application discussions unless there was an exceptional and recorded reason for not doing. **Action SER**

6.3 North-of-Tyne Devolution – the Committee supported the Chief Officer's action in writing direct to the Secretary of State to seek a Local Council seat on the new authority's overview and scrutiny committee. It was agreed that the Chairman, Vice-Chairmen and Chief Officer prepare an election scheme for such a position balancing the need for democratic accountability with the wish to ensure that a representative could present the whole of the sector. **Action AW, JRP, TH, MW & SER**

6.4 The Committee in Public Life's call for evidence on Local Government Ethical Standards – The Committee had seen the representation made by a Member Council and a paper circulated by Cllr Tebbutt. During the discussion the following points were made (based on experiences of Members of the Committee)

- Sadly, a number of the complaints could have been dealt with by an apology at an early stage

- The lack of effective sanctions against a Councillor for extreme conduct was very much regretted, particularly when officers were the subject of bullying
- The different enforcement regimes for breaching disclosable pecuniary interest rules (the police and CPS to investigate) and non-pecuniary interests (the monitoring officer to investigate) – The Chief Officer was asked to enquire in the police had received any complaints in this area. **Action SER**

The Committee resolved to make a submission taking into account the submissions and the above points. **Action SER**

6.5 The change of date for the Annual General Meeting was agreed as 29 September 2018.

6.6 The Committee agreed respond to the consultation on Transport for the North's strategic transport plan by pressing for

- The dualling of both the A1 and A69
- The reopening of existing freight lines for passenger traffic
- The investigation of innovative ideas to support public transport, especially in rural areas.

### **Action SER**

#### 7: Newcastle Issues

The Chief Officer reported on his on-going work with the national NALC regarding the rights and obligations of Local Councils when payments were due under the Community Infrastructure Levy

#### 8: Northumberland Issues

8.1 Mrs Anderton offered to circulate her notes of the Town & Parish Liaison Working Group as the Chief Officer had been unable to attend.

#### **Action MA**

8.2 Members of the Committee reported that the County Council had given assurances that Local Councils in the hinterland of the four market towns would be consulted on the parking studies recently undertaken.

8.3 Cllr Hedley had sought comments on the draft County Council Officers Who's Who and expressed his thanks for those made.

## 9: County Committee Member's Issues

Councillor Parks drew attention to the continuing retention of the New Homes Bonus by the County Council irrespective of the effect on Local Councils when considerable numbers of new dwellings were being constructed in their area. The Committee repeated its concern at this and the similar retention of Council Tax Benefit. Representations will continue to be made to the County Council at every appropriate opportunity. Amble Town Council had been seeking a meeting with senior County Council Members for some time with no success and the Chief Officer was asked to assist. **Action IP & SER**

## 10: National ALC Issues

10.1 Councillor Francis had provided a written report which was adopted with thanks. [A copy is attached to the signed minutes]

10.2 Attention was specifically drawn to the potential funds for local communities under the consultation on "Implementing Geological Disposal". A link will be inserted in a forthcoming Enews. **Action SER**

## 11: The Association's Constitution

11.1 A report had been circulated following the meeting of the Working Group [A copy is with the signed minutes]

11.2 One further amendment was agreed, to allow the Treasurer to speak and vote at the AGM, and then for the report to be circulated to Member Councils. **Action SER**

## 12: Memorandum of Understanding with CAN

A draft of the revised agreement to run until 31 March 2021 had been circulated following the meeting of the Chairman and Vice-Chairmen with CAN and was agreed by the Committee. [A copy is with the signed minutes]

## 13: Any Urgent Other Business

13.1 Mrs Anderton drew attention to the new audit processes.

13.2 Cllr Varley advised the Committee that the seemingly well-supported planning application for new schools in Ponteland had been called in by

the Secretary of State, meaning construction would not now start in the spring.

14: Next Meeting

The next meeting is scheduled for Saturday 23 June 2018 at the Storey Park Community Centre, Morpeth

Further meetings of the County Committee are programmed for

- 8 September 2018
- *29 September 2018 – AGM – The Sill, Bardon Mill*
- 17 November 2018

The meeting closed at 1145.

Confirmed as a true record

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