

Northumberland Association of Local Councils

Meeting of the County Committee at 10.15 am on Saturday 19 January 2019 at the Storey Park Community Centre, Morpeth

Present:

Councillors Barrell, Dunn, Francis, Hogg, Hood, Hughes, Parks, Peden, Potts, Price, Rook, Sambrook, Tebbutt, Thurgood, Varley, Vaughan and Wallace (Chairman in the Chair)

Mrs M Anderton

Ms G Turner (Hon. Treasurer)

DL Nicholson (Choppington PC Clerk) – who left after item 7.1

SE Rickitt (NALC Chief Officer)

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

The Chairman welcomed all to the meeting and especially Cllr Hughes representing the Glendale councils.

Apologies were noted from Councillors Gillanders, Hillan and Wood, and Mr Woodard

7.1 Northumberland County Council – Budget Issues

- a) With the consent of the meeting, the Chairman brought this item forward
- b) Mr Nicholson informed the Committee that there are potential changes to the frequency of some environmental work being contemplated by the County Council for the autumn/winter 2019. The County Council is currently consulting on possible changes to working patterns for its staff. The Committee accepted that generally negotiations on working patterns for staff is a matter for the County Council but ask for reassurance that, where such changes may have a direct impact on arrangements with a particular local council, these have already discussed the issue with the councils concerned.

- c) The Committee was concerned about the potential outcome of changes on the frequency of environmental services. It appears that amongst the types of work be considered are reductions in hedge cutting, grass-edging and shrub maintenance, all matters which concern many local councils as they affect the appearance of their community. It is understood that the suggestion is to reduce frequencies from annual work to every two or three years with exceptions for work needed to avert danger.
- d) Members of the Committee wondered if there is a likely effect on other areas, for example the County Council's ability to provide a Christmas Lights service.
- e) The Committee appreciated the financial pressures on the County Council but has tried to emphasise that service reductions such as these should be the subject of prior discussion as some local councils may wish to "top-up" the work done by the County Council either by direct payments to the County Council or by engagement of local contractors. That does, however, involve expenditure which has to be budgeted for by local councils.
- f) The County Council itself has requested local councils to provide their precepts by this coming Friday, 25 January 2019 and most local councils will have already set their budgets and plans for FY 2019/2020. Members noted that NALC takes every opportunity to remind the County Council, at both councillor and officer level, of the need to consult local councils during the autumn each year.
- g) Following discussion, the Committee agreed to express grave concern at the latest disclosure of these proposals and to ask they be delayed until autumn/winter 2020 to enable there to be consultation and dialogue with Northumberland's local councils?
- h) The Committee agreed to raise this at the meeting of the Town & Parish Liaison Working Group on 1 February.
- i) The Committee thanked Choppington Parish Council for alerting the Association to this proposal.

2: Committee Membership

There were no candidates for co-option.

3: Minutes of the 17 November 2018 meeting

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

4: Financial Issues

4.1 The Committee noted and adopted the financial summary. [A copy is attached to the signed minutes]

4.2 There were three unpaid subscriptions and the Chief Officer was asked to write to the Chairmen as well as the clerks of those Councils.

5: Chief Officer's Report

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

5.2 Members asked that the County Council be asked for clarification of the proposals for the re-introduction of parking charges as there had been recent media announcements which seemed to indicate these had been modified. **Action SER**

5.3 The Chief Officer informed the Committee that the Director of Investigations for the Local Govt. & Social Care Ombudsman has agreed to participate in a workshop. With that extra information, the indicative training programme was agreed. **Action SER**

5.4 The Committee agreed that the representative on the national NALC's Assembly and the Chief Officer should attend the national NALC Conference in autumn 2019. **Action DF & SER**

5.5 The Committee fully supported the action in seeking information from Member Councils on instances of pressure selling on the vulnerable and the Chairman will forward details of a template letter being suggested as a way of seeking restoration of funds by UK banks. Cllr Rook will forward the Member Council email to the Age Advisory Committee run by the Police and Crime Commissioner. **Actions VR & AW**

6: Newcastle Issues

Cllr Rook had no specific issues to draw to the attention of the Committee.

7: Northumberland Issues

7.1 – *The County Council budget – see above.*

7.2 The Committee are anxious that the County Council's Conference and Liaison Working Group properly reflect the issues raised by the Association and Member Councils. **Action SER**

8: County Committee Member Issues

8.1 Cllr Rook has forwarded information on bus services to the Chief Officer who will send it to the Committee. **Action SER**

8.2 Cllr Francis drew attention to a potential change to how income and expenditure were shown in a council's accounts when there was a joint committee. It was agreed to make representations to the national NALC and the Joint Practitioners Advisory Group seeking a delay and proper consultation. **Action SER**

9: National NALC Issues

9.1 Cllr Francis was congratulated on being elected Chair of the Policy Committee.

9.2 Cllr Francis drew attention to the following policy issues considered at a recent meeting of the Policy Committee

- a) A request for MHCLG to review Class Q of the General Permitted Development Order which allows conversion of agricultural buildings to domestic dwellings as there are concerns of abuse.
- b) A request for a legislative amendment to enable local councils to make complaints to the Ombudsman over the actions of principal councils.
- c) A suggestion that all 16-18 year olds be entitled to free bus passes if they are in full-time education, irrespective of the institution attended.
- d) Requests for MHCLG to de-rate public toilets run by local councils and to re-allocate council tax on empty second homes for community use in parished areas.
- e) The continuing research to see if neighbourhood plans are being disregarded or accorded little weight by local planning authorities and inspectors.

10: Social Media

The Committee agreed the draft policy and noted the intention to run further workshops during 2019. [A copy of the draft policy is attached to the signed minutes] **Action SER**

11: Any Other Business

11.1 The Chairman drew attention to the national NALC’s very recent publication including examples of good work by three Member Councils, Berwick, Choppington and Morpeth. The Chief Officer will forward details to the Committee and all Member Councils. **Action SER**

11.2 The Chief Officer was asked to seek information from the County Council of its supervision of work on frontages as Members felt contractors were too often disregarding the needs of footway users. **Action SER**

11.3 A Member Council has drawn attention to the inability of an English Local council to pay a Dependent Carers Allowance, unlike Community Councils in Wales. It was agreed to ask the national NALC to seek a legislative change to enable such an allowance to be paid. **Action SER**

12: Date of Next Meeting

This will be Saturday 23 March 2019, with future meetings as below

- 8 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.....