

Northumberland Association of Local Councils

Meeting of the County Committee at 10.15 am on Saturday 8 June 2019 at the Storey Park Community Centre, Morpeth

Present:

Councillors Barrell, Bowlas, Coates, Cuthbert, Fenwick, Francis, Hedley, Hillan, Hogg, Peden, Rook, Roughead, Tebbutt, Thurgood, Varley, Wallace (Chairman in the Chair) and Wood

Mr D Woodard (President)

Mrs M Anderton

Ms G Turner (Hon. Treasurer)

SE Rickitt (NALC Chief Officer)

Rob Murfin (Director of Planning, Northumberland County Council) - who left after item 3

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

The Chairman welcomed all to the meeting and on the 75th Anniversary of D-Day paid tribute to those who had served and given down their lives in the conflict both on active service and on the home front.

Apologies were noted from Cllrs Dunn, Gillanders, Hood, Hughes, Hull, Parks, Potts and Sambrook.

2: Committee Membership

Cllr Steven Phelps (Dinnington) was co-opted to fill the Newcastle (2) vacancy.

The following were noted as substitutes pending confirmation that no other Council within their constituency wishes to stand.

Cllr	Council	Substitute for	Constituency
Alan Bowlas	Berwick TC	Gregah Roughead	<u>Berwick & Islandshire</u>
Christine Cuthbert	Prudhoe TC	Gerry Price	<u>Prudhoe and East Tynedale</u>
Bob Hull	Hexham TC	Tom Gillanders	<u>Hexham and Hexhamshire</u>

3: Planning in Northumberland

3.1 The Chairman was pleased to welcome Rob Murfin, the County Council's Director of Planning to the meeting.

3.2 During his presentation, Mr Murfin mentioned the following

- He was anxious to meet as many Parish, Town and Community Councils as was possible, usually at cluster/group meetings

- He was very clear about the need to involve Local Councils in the development control process
- It was his belief that the application of planning policies means placing different weights on aspects of a proposal and that Local Councillors were ideally placed to provide evidence of where a balance would lie
- He emphasised that this must only be on material planning grounds and that it was clear that consultation was not a referendum to gauge the popularity or otherwise of a proposal
- Local Councils often had detailed knowledge of sites which was relevant but perhaps not known to developers and/or the planning officers
- His aim was to ensure that applicants had the best opportunity to present their case for development, to avoid later allegations of maladministration
- He was pleased to be able to inform the Committee that the draft Northumberland Local Plan had been formally submitted to MHCLG for examination.
- The evidence shows that there is no need to allow developers to cherry-pick Green Belt sites for development.
- He indicated that Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) was perhaps not the best solution for Northumberland but that he would encourage Local Councils to devise a list of potential items which could be funded by a developer, should an opportunity arise.
- He was of a clear view that Neighbourhood Plans have a growing role as part of the formal Development Plan [see below]
- The involvement of communities in assessing the type of affordable housing needed for their areas
- He indicated that he was formulating potential changes to staffing arrangements to bring closer working between those devising policy and those dealing with applications. The County Council dealt with over 5300 planning applications in the previous year.

3.3 Members of the Committee then raised issues which included

- The weight given to Neighbourhood Plans – he accepted that in the past insufficient weight had been given but an up-to-date Neighbourhood Plan should supplement the County Council's Local Plan.
- He suggested it was inappropriate for Neighbourhood Plans to reproduce policies in the County Local Plan, but they should focus on matters important to their community which might only briefly be mentioned in the County Local Plan
- Neighbourhood Plans must be kept under review if they are to have full effect
- If the review only recommended minor amendments it was unlikely to require a further referendum. If alterations were significant, then a referendum would be required.
- He did not see a need to release parts of the Green Belt for development. There are approximately 22,000 dwellings with planning permission at the present time, which have not yet been constructed.
- He will look at seeing if the documents on the website can be split into manageable sizes
- He is conscious of the need to revise the County Council's current guidance on s106 planning obligations and can look at whether Local Councils can and should be parties to the obligation.

3.4 The Chairman thanked Mr Murfin for giving up his time and being so positive about the role of the Local Council Sector, sentiments endorsed by the Committee

4: Minutes of the 23 March 2019 meeting

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

5: The draft Annual Report 2018/2019 and the AGM

5.1 The Chief Officer reported that the new Mayor of the North of Tyne Combined Authority had agreed to be the speaker at the AGM on 28 September 2019. It was agreed to authorise the Chief Officer, in consultation with the President and Chairman, to arrange for a venue having regard to the Mayor's diary.

5.2 The Committee was informed that the 2018/2019 accounts had been audited with no changes to the summary shown in the draft Annual Report. Subject to the correction of some minor typographical errors, the draft was approved.

6: Financial Issues

6.1 The Committee noted and adopted the financial summary. [A copy is attached to the signed minutes] The meeting was informed that only 22 Councils had not yet paid their 2019/2020 subscriptions and that Kirknewton had re-joined the association.

6.2 The Committee considered their recommendation to the AGM for a change in subscriptions for 2020/2021. At their AGM the national NALC agreed the following indicative rises for future years

- 2020/2021 - CPI or 3% whichever is the lower
- 2021/2022 - CPI or 3% whichever is the lower

Both are subject to caps for larger Councils.

The Committee agreed to recommend that this Association increases both the standard amount (currently £31.62) and the variable element based on the Band D equivalent (27.1p per £1.00) by the same percentages

7: NALC Chief Officer's Report

7.1 The NALC Chief Officer's Report was adopted subject to the following issues. [A copy is attached to the signed minutes]

7.2 The Officer was pleased to say that a further Member Council had received borrowing approval from MHCLG. Experience underlines the need for Council considering seeking borrowing approval to undertake extensive public consultation before submitting the application.

7.3 The Committee agreed that it was premature to seek a meeting with the Police and Crime Commissioner ahead of the by-election being held in July. Members from a number and range of Councils indicated concerns at the perceptions of rising crime, the amount of vandalism and the costs being incurred by Member Councils in supporting what many see as frontline police services.

7.4 The Committee agreed to survey Member Councils and the Chief Officer is prepare a draft for circulation. **Action SER**

7.5 The Chief Officer was able to report a recent conversation with the Committee for Standards in Public Life when it was indicated that a MHCLG announcement is expected to generally agree with the CSPL's recommendations regarding local government's ethical standards. Members were informed that the County Council's Standards Committee had endorsed the recommendation but have questioned why the Independent Person should only serve one term.

7.6 The Committee agreed to the Chief Officer attending the Overview & Scrutiny Committee of the North of Tyne Combined Authority (when possible) and offering to speak if there were issues affecting Local Councils.

7.7 All Councils using the Association's Portal for their websites have been sent copies of the analytics for January-March 2019. The Chief Officer will circulate those for the Portal as a whole and the Association's website. **Action SER**

8: Newcastle Issues

8.1 There were no contested Local Council elections in May 2019 and the Committee confirmed that the Chief Officer should approach the two non-member Councils to see if a change in membership meant they may wish to re-join.

8.2 The Committee also endorsed the idea of suggesting to Newcastle City Council and North Tyneside Council of the potential for involving communities by the creation of Local Councils rather than merely having calls made as of result of opposition to the principal council.

9: Northumberland Issues

9.1 The next meeting of the Town and Parish Liaison Working Group is on 19 June 2019 and the Chairman reported that he and the Chief Officer were meeting the new Chair on the Group on 18 June in the first of what is hoped to be a series of regular meetings.

9.2 The Chairman was also pleased to report on meetings with senior officers of the County Council and their positive approach to involving Local Councils.

10: County Committee's Member Issues

10.1 The Tyneside Clean Air Initiative was raised by Cllr Francis. The Committee shared his concern that there had been no discernible consultation with communities outside the Tyneside conurbation. Members expressed the hope that the new Combined Authority would reduce the likelihood of failing to consult the wider area in future.

10.2 Cllr Roughead reported concerned over the way in which Northumberland was able to participate in the formulation of Transport Policy and asked that the Committee make representations to the Combined Authority to ensure there was a Northumberland seat on the Transport bodies formulating policy. This was agreed. **Action SER**

11: National ALC issues

Cllr Francis reported various matters including

- His election as Chair of the Policy Committee (warm congratulations being given by the Committee)
- Considerations of the House of Lords' Report on the Rural Economy
- The need for traffic commissioners to consult Local Councils when considering applications for operating bases
- The revisions to the statistics on Local Council precepts which show continuing moderation and the continuing pressure to remove the spectre of tax referendums from Local Councils
- The need for consultation before changes are made to accounting and audit guidance

12: Declaration of Gifts and Hospitality

The Committee approved the draft policy. [A draft is attached to the signed minutes]

13: The Northumberland & Newcastle Local Councillor Census 2019

An analysis had been circulated following the close of the survey on 31 May 2019. Whilst it was only the second survey, certain trends were encouraging, and the Committee agreed this should be repeated every two years.

14: Any other urgent business

None

15: Date of next meeting

This was noted as Saturday 7 September 2019

Further meetings of the County Committee are programmed for

- 28 September 2019 – AGM
- 16 November 2019

The Committee agreed the following provisional programme for 2020 – all are Saturdays

- 18 January 2020
- 21 March 2020
- 6 June 2020
- 5 September 2020
- 26 September 2020 – AGM
- 14 November 2020

The meeting closed at 1155

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