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Northumberland Association of Local Councils

**NALC Enews
31 March 2020**

**Please forward to all Councillors &
Staff of Member Councils**

Community Volunteers

These are the links for volunteers on the City and County Councils' websites

The City Council

<https://www.newcastle.gov.uk/services/public-health-wellbeing-and-leisure/public-health-services/coronavirus-covid-19/citylife>

The County Council

<https://www.northumberland.gov.uk/coronavirus/Northumberland-Communities-Together-1/Northumberland-Communities-Together.aspx>

at 30 March)

The following is a noted received late on Monday from the County Council

We have resumed garden waste collections today in order to help reduce the amount of waste being put into general waste bins (which are our priority), and we will continue to provide garden waste collections as long as we possibly can. However, in order to help ensure a reliable and deliverable garden waste service we won't be accepting any new customers from 30 March 2020, so it is only those residents who subscribed last year who will be able to renew their subscriptions.

We have also restarted some grass cutting activity as of today, as it is important to keep our local environment clean, green and safe and the summer grounds maintenance programme is key to this.

Maintaining an attractive local environment is important during this difficult time as it helps to lift public spirits and sense of well being and ensures that residents have accessible locations within their local area where they can safely take daily exercise, whilst maintaining social distancing requirements and restrictions on any unnecessary travel. In delivering this key service it is crucial that we protect the staff involved and we have introduced a number of additional control measures for our grounds maintenance staff.

We will continue to review our service delivery arrangements taking into account any changes to Government guidance, restrictions and other service demands and will endeavour to keep you and our colleagues in the Town and Parish Councils informed of any changes being made.

Audit of the 2019/2020 Accounts

All clerks should have received an email from PKF Littlejohn explaining that they have delayed issuing the AGAR and other documents until MHCLG and SAAA issue guidance on how the audit is to be conducted.

The national NALC are pressing hard on our behalf.

it may mean that the contact list is incorrect

sba@pkf-littlejohn.co.uk

Electronic / Virtual Meetings

The Coronavirus Act 2020 enables MHCLG to make regulations permitting electronic meeting. Many Councils are informally conducting their business using a variety of means and in the current circumstances, it must be highly unlikely that decisions could be challenged because Councillors were unable to physically congregate in a room.

When the regulations are issued, we will let Member Councils know.

One issue being raised is the position of Councillors who do not have access to the internet etc. There is no easy solution as those Councillors may well be in a vulnerable group and thus are likely to have to self-isolate in any event.

It might be worth asking if they do not have any access to electronic means of participation. Experience is showing that some will have the necessary equipment but a disinclination to use it for perhaps understandable reasons. In the current National Emergency, there may be no option other than to use electronic means for holding meetings.

The six-month rule

Under the current law, a vacancy is deemed to occur if a Councillor is absent for six months without a leave of absence being granted by the Council before the six months are completed (a summary of the more complex provisions).

Both the LGA (for the City and County Councils) and the national NALC have asked MHCLG to vary this rule. No definitive response has been received but as all elections have been postponed, including by-elections, it would seem reasonable to expect provision to be made.

Allotments

<https://www.nsalg.org.uk/news/covid19-information/>

Other News

Some other matters are still filtering through the system but whether any deadlines will be extended remains to be seen

1: Merger of the Northumberland and Tyne & Wear Local Government Pensions Schemes

<https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/proposed-merger-of-the-northumberland-and-tyne-and-wear-pension-funds>

2: The March letter to chief planning officers

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/875045/Chief_Planners_Newsletter_-_March_2020.pdf

3: CiLCA

SLCC have agreed to put a brake on new registrations in England for six weeks from Monday 2nd March. This will not affect people who are already registered. SLCC will ensure that potential candidates get the right information explaining why this is happening and it will go on the website. If you have candidates expecting to register **do please encourage them to continue preparing their work**. This will not affect the one-year window for completing CiLCA.

The reason for this break is to enable assessors to clear some of the massive and rather overwhelming backlog of units waiting to be assessed. We also have a new assessor learning the ropes; they need all their work to be second-assessed before flying solo. One of the experienced assessors needs space in which to do this.

If you have any questions, please contact Elisabeth Skinner at SLCC

4: Toilet Tax - a message from the national NALC

The campaign to end the toilet tax continues as you know, so please circulate the following link to a NALC / British Toilet Association (BTA)

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to complete this short evidence survey by 1/5 to help us gather ongoing evidence as to why the toilet tax has to end as soon as possible - thanks.

Ironically the resurrected Non Domestic Rating (Public Lavatories) Bill 2019-21 to finally end the toilet tax was re-commenced last week in the Commons and has Commons second reading on 30/3 – see [here](#). The campaign doesn't end until the toilet tax has ended on the statute book.

The evidence gathered from the survey will be of use at later stages of the bill.

5: The Govt. has issued its response to a report on the revitalisation of the high street

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/revitalisation-of-the-high-street>



*If you have any comments or observations, please contact
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or

Louise Currie, Community Initiatives Officer louisecurrie@ca-north.org.uk

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