

POLICY DIGEST, December 2015

This digest presents a summary of the latest policy developments at a national and regional level of strategic relevance to Northumberland and highlights Government announcements of relevance to local government. This issue covers period from Monday 30 November to Friday 1 January. Previous and subsequent editions are available at www.northumberland.gov.uk/policy.

Policy Development	Action	Lead
<p>PUBLIC SERVICE DELIVERY</p> <p>Greg Clark hails historic 4-year settlement and support for adult social care (17 December 2015)</p> <p>Greg Clark hailed a historic settlement for town halls as he ushered in a new era of long-term financial certainty for councils, while prioritising adult social care for the nation's ageing population. The details of a revolutionary 4-year funding package for councils in England have been published for consultation, in a move which transforms the relationship between central and local government. By the end of this decade town halls will be financed from revenues they raise locally, such as council tax and business rates, rather than central government grants. This is something local government has spent decades campaigning for. Views on the proposed arrangements are invited by 15 January 2016.</p> <p>https://www.gov.uk/government/news/greg-clark-hails-historic-4-year-settlement-and-support-for-adult-social-care</p> <p>In addition, the importance of funding adult social care has been recognised with up to £3.5 billion of additional funds being made available to local government for such services by 2019 to 2020. However, in response to this, four leading agencies representing providers and commissioners across the health and social care sector (Association of Directors of Adult Social Services; Care and Support Alliance; Care Providers Alliance; and NHS Confederation) have called for 'urgent' talks with Government in the face of a mounting crisis in the care of older and disabled people. They have bluntly stated bluntly that the recent Spending Review settlement "is not sufficient to resolve the care funding crisis. They cite that: "ultimately the package put forward for social care will not enable us to fill the current gap in funding, cover additional costs associated with the introduction of the National Living Wage, nor fully meet future growth in demand due to our ageing population." Equally dangerously, they warn that some of the resources are back-loaded - with Better Care Funding not reaching levels of any significance until towards the end of this Parliament.</p> <p>Finally, the settlement also indicates that the Government will consider giving more responsibility to councils in England and Wales, to support older people with care needs – including people who, under the current system, would be supported through Attendance Allowance. This will protect existing claimants, so there will be no cash losers, and new responsibilities will be matched by the transfer of equivalent spending power. The Government is planning to consult in the New Year on this proposal, including on the right model of devolution and the level of flexibility that councils would need in order to effectively deliver this additional responsibility.</p>	<p>Officers to consider feeding comments into the consultation</p>	<p>Alison Elsdon, Director of Corporate Resources</p> <p>Jane Bowie, Head of Safeguarding and Strategic Commissioning</p>

<p>Beyond business rates</p> <p>The funding landscape for local government is changing. The move away from centrally redistributed grants towards places being more dependent on the business rate revenues they collect locally provides an opportunity to improve the way local services in the UK are financed. Giving places more responsibility to raise and retain their own funding will provide cities with sharper incentives to back investment in the things that can make a difference to their local economy, such as investing in skills and infrastructure. This report from the Centre for Cities explores the impact of the business rate devolution proposals and argues for the need to go further. It explains how diversifying the local tax base and creating sharper incentives for economic growth can build a more sustainable system of local government funding for all localities.</p> <p>http://www.centreforcities.org/publication/beyond-business-rates-how-fiscal-devolution-can-incentivise-cities-to-grow/</p>	For information	Alison Elsdon, Director of Corporate Resources
PLACE SHAPING		
<p>National Planning Policy: consultation on proposed changes (7 December 2015)</p> <p>This Government consultation is seeking views on some specific changes to National Planning Policy in the following areas: broadening the definition of affordable housing, to expand the range of low cost housing opportunities for those aspiring to own their new home; increasing residential density around commuter hubs, to make more efficient use of land in suitable locations; supporting sustainable new settlements, development on brownfield land and small sites, and delivery of housing allocated in plans; and supporting delivery of starter homes. This consultation closes at 22 February 2016.</p> <p>https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/national-planning-policy-consultation-on-proposed-changes</p>	Officers to consider feeding comments into the consultation	Geoff Paul, Director of Planning and Economy
<p>Massive boost to rail services in the north-east brings Northern Powerhouse to life (9 December 2015)</p> <p>Rail journeys in the north-east will undergo the biggest transformation in decades, thanks to an unprecedented package of improvements being delivered in new franchise deals, announced by Government. More than 500 brand-new carriages, the removal of the outdated and unpopular Pacer trains, room for 40,000 extra passengers at the busiest times, and more than 2,000 extra services a week will be delivered across the north. The Government has announced it intends to award the Northern franchise to Arriva Rail North Limited, and the TransPennine Express franchise to First TransPennine Express Ltd. Together they will oversee a massive £1.2 billion boost to rail services with brand-new modern trains, more seats, more services and a host of improvements to deliver a modern, 21st century passenger experience - as well as playing a vital role in bringing the Northern Powerhouse to life, rebalancing the economy, creating jobs, opportunity and growth, and providing significantly better journeys across the region.</p> <p>https://www.gov.uk/government/news/massive-boost-to-rail-services-in-the-north-east-brings-northern-powerhouse-to-life</p>	For information	Geoff Paul, Director of Planning and Economy

<p>Housing Commission</p> <p>The Local Government Association has launched a Housing Commission to set out a forward-looking vision for the future of housing and the relationship between councils and communities. The Housing Commission will focus on four themes: Housebuilding; Place shaping, community and infrastructure; Employment, welfare reform and social mobility; Health and quality of life for an ageing population. Evidence is sought on the key issues for communities, partners and councils, on good practice that has successfully addressed those issues, and what is needed to build on those successes. The Commission will take a medium-term view incorporating current housing reforms but will look beyond them in making the case for councils to be able to deliver the homes our communities and places need. Contributions are invited before the 26 February 2016. Findings will be brought together in a report in Spring 2016 and presented at the LGA Annual Conference in June 2016.</p> <p>http://www.local.gov.uk/housing/-/journal_content/56/10180/7570944/ARTICLE</p>	<p>Officers to consider feeding comments into the consultation</p>	<p>Kevin Lowry, Director of Local Services and Housing</p>
<p>Delivering for rural communities (17 December 2015)</p> <p>The government's has published its response to the Lord Cameron Review on Rural Proofing. The response outlines a series of measures which will make sure the needs of people living in rural areas are taken properly into account in decision making, and that its residents are given the same opportunities as those based in cities. By ensuring government departments fully understand rural issues, we are able to better protect the services delivered for rural communities, as well as boosting productivity in the countryside. An online evidence hub will help the almost ten million people who live in the English countryside by providing crucial insight, such as the fact that flexible, home-working is more prevalent in rural than in urban areas, and tends to involve higher skilled, higher wage roles. Along with making evidence more freely available, other measures to boost productivity and increase opportunities in rural areas in the response to the Lord Cameron Review include: a new 'rural ambassador' role operating across government departments; ministers representing rural issues on 'task forces' which operate across government on identified priority issues including housing and broadband; and a Cabinet Office led oversight for rural proofing across government.</p> <p>https://www.gov.uk/government/news/delivering-for-rural-communities</p>	<p>For information</p>	<p>Geoff Paul, Director of Planning and Economy</p>
<p>Setting the first walking and cycling investment strategy (17 December 2015)</p> <p>The Government has published its timetable for the development of the first cycling and walking investment strategy (CWIS). In February 2015, the government introduced a duty through the Infrastructure Act 2015 for the Secretary of State for Transport to bring forward a cycling and walking investment strategy in England. This timetable document sets a long term vision for walking and cycling to 2040 through a series of consecutive 5 year strategies. The starting principle for the development of the investment strategy is a desire for cycling and walking to become the norm for short journeys or as part of a longer journey in places that are designed first and foremost for people on foot or bicycle. The document also sets out the elements that will form the first investment strategy, which will be a step towards delivering our manifesto commitment to double cycling - an ambition document and statement of funds available, governance structures, a performance monitoring framework, and a national walking and cycling infrastructure plan study. Public consultation on the draft first CWIS will take place next spring with publication following in the summer.</p> <p>https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/setting-the-first-walking-and-cycling-investment-strategy</p>	<p>For information</p>	<p>Geoff Paul, Director of Planning and Economy</p>

<p>New Homes Bonus: sharpening the incentive: technical consultation (17 December 2015)</p> <p>This consultation seeks views on options for changes to the New Homes Bonus to better reflect authorities' delivery of new housing. It also seeks views on reducing the number of years in which current and future payments are made. This consultation closes at 10 March 2016.</p> <p>https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/new-homes-bonus-sharpening-the-incentive-technical-consultation</p>	<p>Officers to consider feeding comments into the consultation</p>	<p>Geoff Paul, Director of Planning and Economy</p>
<p>Homelessness inquiry launched (17 December 2015)</p> <p>The Communities and Local Government (CLG) Committee has announced an inquiry into the causes of homelessness as well as the approaches taken by national and local government to prevent and tackle homelessness. The Committee is seeking evidence on the following points: Differing causes of homelessness for households, couples and single people; Steps to tackle homelessness; The relationship between homelessness and the availability of social housing; Measures taken by local authorities to deal with the homeless; The implications of the statutory duty of care, and possible extension to those in danger of homelessness, particularly single people; Different approaches to homelessness in big cities and in non-metropolitan areas; The re-establishment of the cross government Ministerial Working Group on Preventing and Tackling Homelessness; How levels of homelessness are monitored and reported; The effectiveness of current legislative framework in England with a review of the different approaches taken in Scotland and Wales. Written evidence is invited by 8 February 2016.</p> <p>http://www.parliament.uk/business/committees/committees-a-z/commons-select/communities-and-local-government-committee/news-parliament-2015/homelessness-launch-15-16/</p>	<p>Officers to consider feeding comments into the consultation</p>	<p>Kevin Lowry, Director of Housing and Local Services</p>
<p>Government unveils host of measures to further improve road safety (21 December 2015)</p> <p>The Department for Transport has unveiled a raft of measures to improve the safety of Britain's roads. The proposals will ensure learner drivers are properly prepared before their test, including the chance to gain motorway experience with an approved driving instructor. Other measures to take priority in the government's plan for road safety include funding to train the next generation of cyclists through the continuation of Bikeability cycle training in schools, and extra money for police forces to crack down on drug drivers.</p> <p>https://www.gov.uk/government/news/government-unveils-host-of-measures-to-further-improve-road-safety</p>	<p>For information</p>	<p>David Laux, Head of Technical Services</p>

<p>ECONOMIC PROSPERITY</p>		
<p>Iconic coastal heritage sites set for £3 million makeover (11 December 2015)</p> <p>The Government has announced that seventy-seven projects will receive £3 million coastal revival funding. Communities Minister Brandon Lewis said the coastal revival funding will help secure these key seaside attractions "for generations to come". Ranging from theatres to piers and lidos to lighthouses, the projects will each receive grants of up to £50,000 to kick-start restoration work. They are also set to attract £30 million in private and public investment and could support up to 1,500 jobs. Projects set to benefit from the funding include: transforming a church in Blyth as a centre for the creative arts; reopening and reviving the crypt of St Aidan's church in Bamburgh; and developing the underutilised Berwick Barracks into a heritage hub.</p> <p>https://www.gov.uk/government/news/iconic-coastal-heritage-sites-set-for-3-million-makeover</p>	<p>For information</p>	<p>Geoff Paul, Director of Planning and Economy</p>

<p>Government seeks ideas from public and industry for the next stage in UK's digital revolution (29 Dec 2015)</p> <p>Digital Economy Minister Ed Vaizey has called on public and industry to share their ideas on how the UK's digital revolution can be taken to the next stage. In 2010 changes were afoot in east London as a cluster of tech startups began a digital transformation. Tech City UK was born and in the last five years, the UK's digital economy has changed beyond recognition – and in ways few people would have predicted. The UK is now truly a 'Tech Nation' with more than 70 per cent of digital businesses now based outside of the capital. This revolution has been led by entrepreneurs but supported by Government in creating the right environment for ideas and businesses to flourish. Government is now looking at a new Digital Strategy for the UK for the next five years. It wants the UK to be synonymous with digital – a place where digital technologies transform day-to-day life, the economy and government. Views on how this can be realised are requested by 19 January 2015.</p> <p>https://www.gov.uk/government/news/government-seeks-ideas-from-public-and-industry-for-the-next-stage-in-uks-digital-revolution</p>	<p>Officers to consider feeding comments into the consultation</p>	<p>Alison Elsdon, Director of Corporate Resources</p>
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<p>HEALTH & WELLBEING</p>		
<p>New strategy to strengthen sport from the grassroots to the elite (17 December 2015)</p> <p>Public investment into community sport is to reach children as young as five as part of a ground-breaking new strategy on sport announced by Sports Minister Tracey Crouch. The move will see Sport England's remit changed from investing in sport for those aged 14 and over to supporting people from five years old right through to pensioners, in a bid to create a more active nation. Investment will be targeted at sport projects that have a meaningful, measurable impact on how they are improving people's lives – from helping young people gain skills to get into work, to tackling social inclusion and improving physical and mental health. Funding will also be targeted at groups who have low participation rates to encourage those who do not take part in sport and physical activity to get involved. This includes supporting women, disabled people, those in lower socio-economic groups and older people. Sport England will set up a new fund in 2016 to get inactive people physically active and will support and measure participation in sport and wider physical activity going forward.</p> <p>https://www.gov.uk/government/news/new-strategy-to-strengthen-sport-from-the-grassroots-to-the-elite</p>	<p>For information</p>	<p>Bruce Ledger, Chief Executive of Active Northumberland</p>
<p>NHS Shared Planning Guidance</p> <p>The leading national health and care bodies in England have come together to publish shared planning guidance 2016/17 – 2020/21. It sets out the steps to help local organisations deliver a sustainable, transformed health service and improve the quality of care, wellbeing and NHS finances. The planning guidance is backed up by £560 billion of NHS funding, including a new Sustainability and Transformation Fund which will support financial balance, the delivery of the Five Year Forward View, and enable new investment in key priorities. As part of the planning process, all NHS organisations are asked to produce two separate but interconnected plans: a local health and care system 'Sustainability and Transformation Plan', which will cover the period October 2016 to March 2021; and a plan by organisation for 2016/17. This will need to reflect the emerging Sustainability and Transformation Plan.</p> <p>https://www.england.nhs.uk/ourwork/futurenhs/deliver-forward-view/</p>	<p>For information</p>	<p>Jane Bowie, Head of Safeguarding and Strategic Commissioning</p>

CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE		
<p>PM: We will not stand by – failing children's services will be taken over (14 December 2015)</p> <p>The Prime Minister has announced radical reforms which will mean poorly performing children's services must improve – or they will be taken over. Children's services in local authorities, which have persistently failed in the past, will be taken over immediately. Sharper triggers will be put in place so an emergency Ofsted inspection can be ordered where there are concerns about an authority's performance. This could include complaints from whistle-blowers or evidence of poor leadership. High-performing local authorities, experts in child protection and charities will be brought in to turn children's services around – including by acting as sponsors, forming 'trusts' to take over authorities which are judged to be failing. In the past, children's services were taken over on an ad hoc basis with no clear national response to failure. For the first time, a formalised academy style system will be put in place so that any local authority judged as inadequate by Ofsted has to show significant improvement within 6 months or be taken over. If a local authority's children's services fail to improve within 6 months of their Ofsted inspection, a new service leader (Commissioner) will be put in place and high-performing local authorities, experts in child protection and charities will be brought in.</p> <p>https://www.gov.uk/government/news/pm-we-will-not-stand-by-failing-childrens-services-will-be-taken-over</p>	For information	Rachel Farnham, Head of Children's Social Care



Northumberland County Council

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