

NORTHUMBERLAND COUNTY COUNCIL

PARISH LIAISON WORKING GROUP

At a meeting of the **Parish Liaison Working Group** held at Committee Room 1, County Hall, Morpeth on Thursday, 1st May, 2014 at 11.00 am.

PRESENT

K Graham(Chair), TN Thorne(Vice-Chair), J Reid, A Wallace

OFFICERS

JA Garrick	Spatial Policy & Delivery Manager
I Hedley	Locality Development Officer
K Ledger	Head of Development Services
L Little	Democratic Services Officer
C Macbeth	Executive Officer (Local Services)
B Rowland	Executive Director – Place
A Rutherford	Head of Highways and Neighbourhood Services

ALSO PRESENT

R Butler, Choppington TC; P Cowey, Ponteland TC; B Grisdale, Alnwick TC; SP Hedley, West Bedlington TC; A Hinchcliffe, East Tynedale Parish and Town Councils Forum; K Little, Haltwhistle TC; EA Mitcheson, Cramlington TC; D Parker, Morpeth TC; M Parker, Blyth TC; T Reid, Prudhoe TC; W Rogers, Newbiggin TC; A Wallace, East Bedlington TC
R Parker

PART I

15. Apologies for Absence

Apologies were received from P Claridge, M Hodgson, G Miller and C Weir.

16. Notes from previous meeting

The notes of the meeting held on 9 January 2014 were received. An amendment was requested to be made as follows:

Also present to read West Bedlington TC not PC

Clarification had been provided by the Leader of the Council that the Chair of a Parish or Town Council (P/TC) could nominate another Parish or Town Councillor to attend the Working Group to represent the P/TC if the Chair or Vice Chair were unable to attend. In all instances only one representative should attend from each Parish or Town Council.

Discussions had also taken place with the Society of Local Council Clerks on a proposal for P/TC Clerks to meet with the Executive Director – Place on a regular basis to allow more involvement in development work.

17. Update on the review of the Town and Parish Charter for Northumberland

JA Garrick, the Spatial Policy and Delivery Manager introduced the report to the working group which provided feedback on the engagement on the draft revised Town and Parish Charter. It was confirmed that both Community Action Northumberland (CAN) and the Northumberland Association of Local Councils (NALC) had published information on the draft revised Charter which was also available on their websites. Clarification was provided that if the revised Charter was agreed by the Policy Board this would be a framework for effective partnership working, however it would be the choice of each P/TC whether to support the Charter.

In response to points raised regarding communication, B Rowland, the Executive Director – Place, confirmed that a dedicated web site for P/TC was being developed. The management structure of the Council was unavailable on the website at the present time due to the structural changes within the organisation. Once the structure within Local Services had been finalised contact details would be published on the website.

In respect of Finance arrangements, P/T Councillors wished to make it clear that it was now understood that P/TC would provide precept information by a mutually agreed deadline. R. Butler, a member of the Task and Finish Group involved in the revision of the Charter, confirmed that work was still to be undertaken in respect of the four appendices to the revised Charter which would cover communication, ICT, training and purchasing. The revised Charter was easier to read, more concise and linked to the Action Plan and Appendices and would be a useful working document.

RESOLVED that:

1. the engagement and comments received on the draft Northumberland Town and Parish Council Charter be noted;
2. the revised Town and Parish Council Charter (attached at Appendix A) be endorsed for referral to Scrutiny and Policy Board for adoption.

18. Update on progress of Local Council meetings - Update

JA Garrick introduced the report which provided an update on the progress on the establishment of meetings between Senior Council Officers and P/TCs covering the main towns and service centres. It was confirmed that initial meetings had been held which had been very positive. Discussions at the meetings had initially centred round very local issues but would in the future focus on more strategic issues. In order to encourage attendance it was requested that meetings were also scheduled in the evenings.

To allow the roll out of these meetings with smaller parishes suggested groupings had been provided. In discussing these groupings it was suggested that existing clusters should be a core group as these worked well at present and met every quarter to discuss common interests. Some felt that the groupings as suggested were not appropriate and should be looked at again. It was confirmed that the role of the Council Officers was to be the lead contact around the development of the relationship between the Council and P/TC and not to Chair meetings as had occurred in some instances. In discussing the role of the Joint Area Committees and Area Committees, most P/T Councillors considered it was important for these to continue to allow political questions to be asked of the Council, communities to feel involved and to allow petitioners to be heard.

RESOLVED that:

1. the progress of meetings with Town and Parish Councils covering the Main Towns and Service Centres be noted;
2. the comments above regarding groupings be taken into consideration.

19. Proposals for an annual Town and Parish Council conference

The report provided an update on the emerging proposals for the first annual Town and Parish Council conference which would be held in September 2014. It was confirmed that the event would be attended by both County Councillors and P/T Councillors and would be organised in conjunction with NALC. A suggestion was made to include Cluster Working on the agenda.

RESOLVED that the Task and Finish Group established to work on the revised Charter, refine the proposals for the conference.

20. Parish Partnership Agreements – Progress Report

The report was introduced by A Rutherford, Head of Highways and Neighbourhood Services. Positive feedback was provided by A Mitcheson of Cramlington TC who stated that a Partnership Board in Cramlington had been set up and the programme set. The need to balance costs against benefits was noted along with the need for organisations to work together. During discussions it was stressed that all agreements had been based on what the residents had felt to be important in their own areas and was a good way of adding value. The initial agreement with Choppington had taken a long time to develop but was working well. There was some concern that P/TCs would be asked to pay fully for the service in the future. It was stated that some P/TCs in the West of the County had carried work of this nature for a considerable time whilst it was new in the South East of the County. B Rowland highlighted that there had been a need to protect front-line services during the budget exercise which it was considered had been done. The possibility of extending the Partnership relationship could be explored further in the future.

RESOLVED that the information be noted.

21. Asset Transfer Update

The report introduced by A Rutherford provided an update on the progress on the asset transfer process. Individual discussions with P/TC were still taking place on a number of the larger transfers. The need for sustainable cemeteries was noted, however, concern was expressed regarding the possible double charging residents in connection with cemeteries in some instances. B Rowland confirmed that prior to Christmas all P/TCs had been invited to have individual open book discussions to look at local issues. No sweeping decisions would be made and individual cases would not be discussed at this Working Group. A general progress report would be provided at the next meeting.

RESOLVED that the information be noted.

22. Section 106 Agreements

K Ledger the Head of Development Services introduced the report. She highlighted the three tests which must be met for the planning obligation and the need for communities to be aware of S106 limitations. In Northumberland, planning officers currently relied on the various adopted Core Strategies as well as the saved Local Plan policies from the 6 former district and borough councils and various Supplementary Planning Guidance and Documents (SPGs and SPDs) to inform applicants of the requirements for their particular application. Currently the Council did not have a common set of requirements to form the basis for negotiations on s106 obligations across Northumberland. Once adopted the emerging Core Strategy would provide a common baseline for starting negotiations across the County.

It was clarified that within S106 agreements maintenance of play and landscaped areas could only be requested for 5 years unless it was an application for a mineral site. The Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) would be adopted once the adoption of the new Core Strategy had taken place in 2015. The development of Neighbourhood Development Plans was the responsibility of P/TCs however these were resource intensive and as the Council were keen to see these rolled out additional officer support would be put in to differing degrees. Nine were being supported at the present time with 16 expressions of interest having been received. The Council's Regeneration Working Group was looking at the issue. K Ledger advised she would ensure that if an S106 agreement was required in connection with a planning application, this would be included in the Notification letters to P/TCs to make them aware of this fact.

RESOLVED that the information be noted.

K Ledger was thanked by A Hinchcliffe for the Planning Training which had been provided.

23. Dates of Future Meetings

Dates for meetings of the Working Group for the year 2014/15 :

11 am - Thursday 4 September 2014

11 am - Thursday 22 January 2015

11 am - Thursday 7 May 2015

CHAIR _____

DATE _____