

NORTHUMBERLAND COUNTY COUNCIL

PARISH LIAISON WORKING GROUP

At a meeting of the **Parish Liaison Working Group** held at Committee Room 1, County Hall, Morpeth. NE61 2EF on Thursday, 24th October, 2013 at 11.00 am.

PRESENT

D Ledger(Chair), TN Thorne(Vice-Chair), A Wallace

OFFICERS

S Bucknall	Area Maintenance Manager
L Little	Democratic Services Officer
S Mason	Corporate Director of Finance
B Rowland	Corporate Director of Local Services
A Rutherford	Head of Highways and Neighbourhood Services

ALSO PRESENT

Councillor K Graham

L Brown - Ashington Town Council; E Burt – Prudhoe Town Council; R Butler - Choppington Parish Council; P Cowey - Ponteland Town Council; B Grisdale – Alnwick Town Council; S Hedley - West Bedlington Parish Council; A Hinchcliffe – East Tyndale Forum; M Hodgson - Corbridge Parish Council; I Hunter - Berwick Town Council; J McCormack – Ashington Town Council; A Mitcheson – Cramlington Town Council; D Nicholson – Clerk, Choppington Parish Council; D Parker – Morpeth Town Council; T Robson - Hexham Town Council; W Rogers - Newbiggin by the Sea Town Council; Alex Wallace - East Bedlington Parish Council / NALC; C Weir - Amble Town Council.

PART I

2. Apologies for Absence

Apologies were received from J Reid and T Reid

3. Action List

The information was noted.

4. Asset Transfer

Discussions took place regarding the following:

- Play areas, public conveniences, allotments – it was hoped most transfers would be completed within 4 months; work was being undertaken by Legal Services in conjunction with Property Services,

although some issues outstanding.

- S106 Agreements for play areas and open spaces – Town and Parish Councils wish to be involved in their development as they will become responsible for the areas in the future. They need to provide meaningful and substantial benefits to communities. The possibility of funds being S106 funds also being transferred for the maintenance of these areas to also be considered. **Action** - B Rowland to discuss with K Ledger.
- Transfer of open space – was an expectation for transfer to parish and town councils but dialogue to be undertaken with individual town and parish councils on what it has been agreed to transfer and what could be transferred in the future.
- Equalisation across parish/town Councils for cemeteries and community centres – discussions need to be held with individual town and parish councils. **Action** - Dialogue to commence with Parish /Town Councils within next few weeks/months.

5. Parish Council Charter - Update

Not to be discussed in detail at the meeting, however parish and town councils were asked to look at and asked to nominate volunteers to discuss outside the meeting. The following points were noted:

- Charter should be reviewed annually.
- A Working Group should be formed and consist of those already involved and new representatives and also a member of the Policy Board should be involved. The Deputy Leader stated he would be present when details were discussed along with K Graham who would be taking over as Chair of the Parish Council Liaison Working Group.
- New charter needed to be simplified and shorter with easy to read key principles.
- Working Group would bring new charter to January Group for comments and then meetings would be held with smaller clusters to discuss.
- All parish/town councils to be sent a copy of the new charter for comments.
- **Action - Working Group to be formed consisting 6/7 representatives**

6. Budget

S Mason gave a verbal update on the current situation in respect of the setting of the budget and how recent government announcements affected the County.

- It was hoped precept letters would be sent to parish/town councils by the end of the week after agreement from Leader/Deputy Leader.
- It was proposed that the non-collection rate to stay at 1.8%.

- Parish/town councils would be given an indicative figure of how much they would have to raise although the Tax Base would needed to be formally agreed by Policy Board and Council.
- There would be no non-recurrent grant next year.
- NCC needed to be aware of impact on parish/town councils if no grant, bills would need to be raised by 30% - NCC asked to look at again.
- Deputy Leader confirmed all options were being considered, however there were enormous cuts to be made.
- NNDR modelling showed NCC about the same under the new funding process.
- Article in Guardian about the possible restrictions in the percentage increase of precepts that parish/town councils could set in the future was highlighted as something to bear in mind when setting next year's precept. **Action - Link would be forwarded.**

7. **Managing Relationships with Town and Parish Councils**

Necessary to work together and whilst there was no extra cash, NCC would put in more staff resources to allow this to happen. Recruitment was underway to appoint a further 2 Locality Officers. The following points were noted:

- Proposals would allow frustrations with front line services to be escalated easier.
- Grass cutting had improved this year and it was hoped other services could be raised to match.
- The proposals outlined in 3.6 should just state AND not and/or in connection with the 6 monthly county-wide meetings.
- The proposals were welcomed as an improvement.

The recommendations in the report were agreed.

8. **Choppington Parish Council Presentation**

Mr D Nicholson, Clerk to Choppington Parish Council along with S Bucknall from NCC gave a detailed power point presentation on how the two Councils had worked together to improve the standards of neighbourhood services in the area and the involvement of residents in the process. Questions in respect of the presentation could be asked outside of the meeting.

CHAIR

DATE