

NORTHUMBERLAND COUNTY COUNCIL

TOWN AND PARISH LIAISON WORKING GROUP

At a meeting of the **Town and Parish Liaison Working Group** held at Committee Room 1, County Hall, Morpeth on Thursday, 4th September, 2014 at 11.00 a.m.

PRESENT

K Graham(Chair), A Wallace

OFFICERS

K Bartlett	Locality Development Officer
R Bendell	Infrastructure Manager
H Griffiths	Senior Locality Development Officer
I Hedley	Locality Development Officer
M Jeffrey	Countryside Access & Recreation Manager
P Jones	Head of Neighbourhood Services
L Little	Democratic Services Officer
C Macbeth	Executive Officer Local Services
B Rowland	Executive Director Local Services

ALSO PRESENT

Councillor L Simpson, Deputy Business Chair

Amble TC - C Weir; Berwick upon Tweed TC - I Hunter; Corbridge PC - J Hodgson; East Tynedale P&TC Forum - A Hinchcliffe and T Martin; Morpeth TC - D Parker; Newbiggin TC - M Peden; Ponteland TC - C Rawlings; West Bedlington TC - P Hedley

PART I

1. Parish Liaison Working Group Terms of Reference

RESOLVED that the Membership and Terms of Reference for the Working Group as agreed by Council at its meeting on 7 May 2014 be noted.

2. Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor T Thorne, L Brown – Ashington TC, R Butler – Choppington PC, B Drysdale – Alnwick TC, E Mitcheson – Cramlington TC and A Wallace – East Bedlington TC.

3. Notes

RESOLVED that the Notes of the previous meeting held on 1 May 2014 were received with the following amendment noted –

Apologies – Add I Hunter, Berwick upon Tweed TC.

4. Verbal update on the Town and Parish Charter for Northumberland

H Griffiths, Senior Locality Development Officer advised that the Town and Parish Charter had been adopted by Policy Board with the Action Plan to be finalised shortly. The Charter would be launched at the Town and Parish Council on 25 September 2014.

RESOLVED that the information be noted.

5. Meetings with Groups of Parish Councils - July 2014

During July 2014 a series of meetings with the smaller Parish Councils took place across the whole County. K Bartlett, Locality Development Officer provided an overview of the issues raised and general discussions which took place as outlined in the report.

In response to questions regarding the possibility of small Parish Councils coming together to form cluster groups outside of these formal meetings and if support and/or funding would be available to establish such groups, the Executive Director, Local Services explained he was to meet with Town and Parish Clerks that afternoon and he could discuss how this should be taken forward and supported with them. The Locality Development Officer confirmed that whilst support had been provided to set up an existing cluster group in the Rothbury area, it was self-financing. Members of existing forums and groups shared their experiences with the Working Group and highlighted difficulties encountered in setting up and encouraging parish and town councils to work together, however now that these were well established they worked well. It was suggested that existing groups/forums could assist in providing models to help establish new groups.

RESOLVED that the report and recommendations be noted.

6. First Annual Town and Parish Council Conference - update

R Bendall, Infrastructure Manager introduced the report to the Working Group. As most responses indicated a preference for an afternoon session the programme would commence at 2.00 pm on 25 September at County Hall. (Registration 1.00 pm - 2.00 pm) An outline of the programme was circulated to those present. It was highlighted that the “Market Place” stalls provided by external bodies such as NALC and Northumbria in Bloom, and those providing information on various issues, including finance/precepts and grants etc. would be open during the Registration period. At the current time approximately one third of all Town and Parish Councils had indicated they would attend.

RESOLVED that the progress on the planning and organisation of the Conference be noted.

7. Verbal update on the development of the Website

I Hedley, Locality Development Officer advised that live testing of the dedicated website for T&PCs was to be carried out that day. 60% Of T&PCs had responded to a questionnaire regarding the contents of the website. The design was outlined and a hard copy circulated at the meeting. Additional links could be added if required. It was hoped that the website would be accessible at the Conference and feedback would be welcomed.

RESOLVED that the information be noted.

8. Asset Transfer Update

The report outlined the current position regarding the asset transfer programme. It was highlighted that delays had been encountered as some play areas were not considered fit for purpose with T&PCs very reluctant to take on responsibility for these. The use of S.106 money and County Councillors Small Schemes were suggested as possible ways forward. The use of the special expenses charge for play areas which had been levied on T&PCs was questioned. P Jones was to meet with Amble TC on 10 September and would discuss their individual case at that time.

RESOLVED that the information be noted.

9. Cemeteries Update

The report provided an update on progress in addressing three issues which had been raised in respect of the cemetery provision in Northumberland. It was proposed that a sub group be formed to look at the issue of double charging which was a concern for some T&PCs. The Head of Neighbourhood Services would contact T&PCs to request volunteers. A discussion took place regarding the burial space capacity and the expansion of sites. It was highlighted that a loan could be obtained from the Public Works Loans Board at a very good interest rate at the present time for the purchase of land for this purpose. The possible decline in capacity in Church of England church yards within the County was highlighted along with the provision of a private Graveyard in Newbiggin which was run by an Undertaker.

Attention was drawn to the inconsistencies in payment for rent/service charges for use of community buildings across the County and the Executive Director - Local Services advised that a report would be brought to a future meeting of this Working Group.

RESOLVED that the information be noted.