

POLICY DIGEST, March 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 2 March and Friday 3 April. Previous and subsequent editions are available at www.northumberland.gov.uk/policy.

Policy Development	Action	Lead
PUBLIC SERVICE DELIVERY		
<p>Budget 2015: Further devolution of power</p> <p>The Chancellor announced further devolution to the North West, by announcing a pilot scheme in Greater Manchester and Cheshire East, to enable those areas to retain 100% of any additional business rate growth above expected forecasts, beginning in April, subject to formal approval from the Greater Manchester Combined Authority. The new measures will help build on the Long Term Economic Plan for the North West announced by the Prime Minister and Chancellor in January. The plan sets a goal to increase the size of the North West economy by an extra £18 billion in real terms by 2030, equivalent to over £2,000 per person, and to raise the employment rate so that there are over 100,000 more people in employment in the region during the next Parliament.</p> <p>https://www.gov.uk/government/news/budget-2015-what-it-means-for-the-north-west</p>	For information	
<p>Commercial Councils: The rise of entrepreneurialism in local government</p> <p>This new report from Localis considers the innovative ways that the local government sector has responded to austerity and what this might mean for the sector as a whole and wider public services. The study involved extensive interviews with central and local government stakeholders, a survey of 150 stakeholders and a round table discussion. The report, which explores how local government has responded to austerity in the past few years, finds that many councils across England are increasingly operating entrepreneurially, both acting like and partnering with the private sector. The report contends that with austerity showing no sign of relenting whoever forms the next government, and with inexorable demographic change ahead, councils should further this entrepreneurial agenda. To facilitate this, Localis recommend that: councils and appropriate professional bodies increase the focus on commercial and financial skills as part of officers' professional development; councils are given 'Earn Back' powers to stimulate local investment in a similar vein to Greater Manchester's devolution deal; the government use departmental underspends to fund a three year corporation tax holiday for new council owned trading companies to assist them in their start up; and the General Power of Competence is expanded to other parts of the public sector to enable councils to act more like businesses.</p> <p>http://www.localis.org.uk/article/1922/Commercial-Councils:-The-rise-of-entrepreneurialism-in-local-government.htm</p>	For information	

PLACE SHAPING		
<p>New East Coast franchise starts (2 March 2015)</p> <p>Rail minister Claire Perry visited King's Cross station for the official launch of the new service between London and Scotland. The service will transform rail journeys along the East Coast Main Line, with more seats, more services and new trains, underpinned by £140 million of investment. This follows the government announcement in November 2014 that it had awarded the East Coast franchise to a consortium of Stagecoach and Virgin. During her visit Claire Perry also welcomed the launch of the company's new £3 million fund, which will allow passengers and communities along the route to suggest how their experience can be improved.</p> <p>https://www.gov.uk/government/news/new-east-coast-franchise-starts</p>	For information	Geoff Paul, Director of Planning, Economy and Housing
<p>Government delivers on parking promises to help local shops (6 March 2015)</p> <p>Parking measures that put common sense back in the driving seat have been given the green-light by Local Government and Communities Secretary Eric Pickles and Transport Secretary Patrick McLoughlin. Under the new laws to help local shops, drivers will get a 10 minute grace period when parked in a bay. And the use of CCTV 'spy cars' has been banned in the majority of circumstances ending the tyranny of automated fines landing on doorsteps and being issued in industrial volumes. Other measures protecting drivers include new powers for parking adjudicators so they can hold councils to account to tackle parking problems such as poor signage at specific locations. And a powerful new right enables residents and local firms to demand that their council reviews parking in their area, including the charges and use of yellow lines. There will also be tougher rules against heavy-handed action by bailiffs and an end to fines at out-of-order parking meters when there is no alternative way to pay. Guidance will also reinforce that councils cannot use parking to make a profit.</p> <p>https://www.gov.uk/government/news/government-delivers-on-parking-promises-to-help-local-shops</p>	For information	David Laux, Head of Technical Services
<p>Transport for the North: A blueprint for devolving and integrating transport powers in England</p> <p>As momentum builds behind the 'Northern powerhouse' agenda, IPPR North provides a blueprint for an integrated transport system that could transform the North's economic prospects. The north of England has experienced disproportionately low levels of government investment in its transport infrastructure – low both in relation to London and, more importantly, in comparison with city-regions in continental Europe. These low levels of investment have historically held back economic development opportunities in the North. It is now widely recognised that carefully planned investment could unlock significant untapped potential for economic growth within and between the northern cities, as well as opportunities to address wider social and environmental concerns. In this report the case is made for an enhanced Transport for the North body with the necessary powers to maximise the economic, social and environmental performance of the north of England by ensuring that it has the most effective forms of connectivity within and between its constituent parts, and extending out into national and international networks and markets. It offers a detailed blueprint for how the region can create a more productive and competitive economy, and a transport network that is more accessible, accountable and environmentally sustainable.</p> <p>http://www.ippr.org/publications/transport-for-the-north-a-blueprint-for-devolving-and-integrating-transport-powers-in-england</p>	For information	Geoff Paul, Corporate Director of Planning, Economy and Housing

<p>£65 million funding for ultra-low emission cities and green buses (11 March 2015)</p> <p>A dozen cities bidding for a share of a £35 million fund to become centres of excellence for low emission vehicles have been announced by Transport Minister Baroness Kramer and Business Minister Matt Hancock. The Go Ultra Low city scheme will reward cities that demonstrate the most potential to become internationally outstanding examples for the adoption of ultra-low emission vehicles (ULEVs) in a local area. The funding has been announced alongside an additional £30 million to enable local authorities and bus operators to replace existing vehicles with greener, cutting-edge alternatives to help clean up air quality.</p> <p>https://www.gov.uk/government/news/65-million-funding-for-ultra-low-emission-cities-and-green-buses</p>	For information	
<p>Cash boost to get the nation cycling (12 March 2015)</p> <p>A new £1 million campaign to encourage the nation to dust off their bikes and ride more has been launched by Transport Minister Robert Goodwill. The 'Big Bike Revival' brings together a programme of events to be delivered by CTC, the national cycling charity, which will help people cycle more safely and with confidence by giving them the skills to fix and maintain their bikes. The launch comes as the government launches how £15 million will be spent on nearly 300 railway stations to improve cycle facilities. A total of 279 stations will benefit from the grant, which will pay for an additional 7500 new cycle parking spaces to triple the number of cycle parking spaces at stations since 2010.</p> <p>https://www.gov.uk/government/news/cash-boost-to-get-the-nation-cycling</p>	For information	
<p>£275 million to improve local roads (24 March 2015)</p> <p>Councils across England will receive a share of £275 million for major local roads maintenance, Transport Secretary Patrick McLoughlin has announced. The Challenge Fund will be used for one-off major infrastructure schemes by local authorities to improve life for local residents and businesses. The 31 schemes being awarded funding today across the 28 local authorities include safety repairs, bridge renewal, carriageway and drainage improvements, as well as upgrading street lighting in a number of areas to bring them in line with modern standards. Northumberland County Council successfully secured £5.6million for a comprehensive masonry arch refurbishment programme.</p> <p>https://www.gov.uk/government/news/275-million-to-improve-local-roads</p>	For information	David Laux, Head of Technical Services
<p>300 communities win share of £25 million minibus fund (26 March 2015)</p> <p>More than 300 local charities and community groups across England will receive new minibuses from the Department for Transport's £25 million community transport minibus fund, Transport Secretary Patrick McLoughlin has announced. The funding will help elderly residents, people with learning and physical disabilities and those who do not have access to a commercial bus service. The minibuses will improve the everyday lives of people in rural communities and provide a vital link to medical services, shops, and social events. In Northumberland, Watbus Community Transport, Upper Coquetdale Community Transport and Bell View (Belford) have been supported through the scheme.</p> <p>https://www.gov.uk/government/news/300-communities-win-share-of-25-million-minibus-fund</p>	For information	Geoff Paul, Corporate Director of Planning, Economy and Housing

<p>A1 north of Newcastle feasibility study: overview</p> <p>The A1 is an essential link for between Newcastle and Edinburgh but there has been a long-standing call from business and communities to improve it. This study was conducted to identify opportunities and investment solutions for improving the road's role in the local economy and national transport network. The results of the study informed our 'Road investment strategy' (RIS) and particularly the 'RIS investment plan'.</p> <p>https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/a1-north-of-newcastle-feasibility-study-overview</p>	For information	
<p>Driving forward: a new era for England's major roads (26 March 2015)</p> <p>Highways England, the government-owned company which will deliver the largest investment in England's major roads in a generation, is officially launched. The company, which replaces the Highways Agency from 1 April, will invest £11 billion in delivering a raft of improvements on England's motorways and major A roads making roads even safer, improving traffic flow and reducing congestion. For every £1 spent there will be £4 in wider benefits to the economy. The company has published its five year plan setting out how the investment will be delivered.</p> <p>https://www.gov.uk/government/news/driving-forward-a-new-era-for-englands-major-roads</p>	For information	
<p>£7.6 million for local transport in rural and isolated areas (27 March 2015)</p> <p>The government has announced the winning bids for the Total Transport Pilot Fund that will allow local authorities in England to try new and better ways of delivering joined-up local transport in rural and isolated areas. Around £2 billion is currently provided each year by a number of agencies for local transport funding. However, this is often not coordinated or integrated at a local level, resulting in duplication and potential waste of public money. This announcement will see £7.6 million Department for Transport funding dedicated to 37 schemes, providing stable funding from one source to improve transport services in local areas. The funding will provide the essential first step for local authorities to implement service integration. The project will fund a range of feasibility studies and other groundwork as well as a number of pilot projects to test the real-world scope for service integration in individual areas. The pilots will run for a maximum of 2 years. Northumberland County Council has successfully secured £250,000 from the Fund.</p> <p>https://www.gov.uk/government/news/76-million-for-local-transport-in-rural-and-isolated-areas</p>	For information	Geoff Paul, Director of Planning, Economy and Housing
ECONOMIC PROSPERITY		
<p>The digital communications infrastructure strategy</p> <p>The government's long term digital communications infrastructure strategy contains commitments to remove barriers to market investment and reduce legislative and regulatory red tape, framed around meeting the government's new headline ambition for the UK's broadband infrastructure: that ultrafast broadband of at least 100 megabits per second should be available to nearly all UK premises.</p> <p>https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-digital-communications-infrastructure-strategy</p>	For information	Alison Elsdon, Head of Corporate Services

<p>Budget measures will deliver thousands of homes and jobs (18 March 2015)</p> <p>Communities Secretary Eric Pickles said the funding contained in the Chancellor’s statement will maintain the momentum gathered since 2010, which has seen house-building reach its highest annual level in seven years, planning permissions reach record numbers and thousands of jobs created. A new Help to Buy ISA will help aspiring homeowners to save for a deposit on their first home with contributions from the government. Twenty areas across the country have been selected as the first Housing Zones, with government plans to work with a further 8 councils – helping to deliver up to 45,000 new homes on brownfield land. And 10 new and expanded enterprise zones will be created from Blackpool to Plymouth, to create thousands of jobs over the next few years.</p> <p>https://www.gov.uk/government/news/budget-measures-will-deliver-thousands-of-homes-and-jobs</p>	For information	Geoff Paul, Corporate Director of Planning, Economy and Housing
<p>The northern powerhouse: one agenda, one economy, one north – a report on the northern transport strategy</p> <p>This report sets out a transport strategy for the north of England. It presents a vision for a north which: has a vibrant and growing economy; acts as a magnet for inward investment; and capitalises on the strengths of northern cities to build a northern powerhouse. This is a vision that has been developed jointly by government, northern city regions and local enterprise partnerships (LEPs). They have worked together and with Highways England, Network Rail and HS2 Ltd as the Transport for the North Partnership Board.</p> <p>https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/northern-transport-strategy</p>	For information	Geoff Paul, Corporate Director of Planning, Economy and Housing
<p>Manifesto for Local Economies</p> <p>The Centre for Local Economic Strategies (CLES) has launched a manifesto setting out how to create local economies that serve all sections of society. Britain is in a significant moment of constitutional, social, economic, environmental and cultural change. Present local economic policy is falling woefully short. It is still too often assumed that wealth will inevitably trickle down to local economies, communities and people. This assumption is not, on the whole, borne out by reality. The economic recovery is geographically and socially skewed, with a growth in inequality, poverty and polarisation and with a divide between the ‘haves’ and ‘have-nots’. Local government services and funding are in crisis. This Manifesto covers a range of ideas that are designed to advance a local economy for all.</p> <p>http://www.cles.org.uk/news/cles-manifesto-for-local-economies-charts-a-more-socially-just-future/</p>	For information	Geoff Paul, Corporate Director of Planning, Economy and Housing
HEALTH & WELLBEING		
<p>NHS England and local councils announce radical power shift as first 10,000 high-need services users gain control of their own integrated health and social care budgets (9 March 2015)</p> <p>NHS England and the LGA have named the first eight sites (Northumberland is one of them) that will, for the first time, blend comprehensive health and social care funding for individuals and allow them to take control of how it is used. The first wave of the Integrated Personal Commissioning (IPC) programme will go live on 1 April 2015, providing some 10,000 people with complex needs with greater power to decide how their own combined health and social care budget is spent. Four groups of high need individuals – older people with long term conditions, children with disabilities and their families, people with learning disabilities, and people living with serious mental illness.</p> <p>http://www.england.nhs.uk/2015/03/09/ipc-sites/</p>	For information	Jane Bowie, Head of Safeguarding & Strategic Commissioning

<p>Cutting the cost of keeping warm: A fuel poverty strategy for England</p> <p>Future governments will now, for the first time, be required by law to tackle fuel poverty by making the coldest, leakiest homes in England more energy efficient. This new Fuel poverty strategy – the first for over a decade – outlines challenges and actions for the next 15 years to ensure future Governments take the right steps to tackle fuel poverty and get help to those who need it most. A new legally binding target – in force since December 2014 – is at the heart of the new strategy. It requires a minimum standard of energy efficiency (Band C) for as many fuel poor homes as reasonably practicable by 2030. The strategy prepares the ground for future new measures with a series of pilots focused on priority areas, ranging from health aspects of fuel poverty through to specific housing types like off gas grid properties and park homes.</p> <p>https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/cutting-the-cost-of-keeping-warm</p>	For information	Karen Ledger, Head of Planning and Housing
<p>The heat is on to ensure warmer, healthy homes for everyone (26 March 2015)</p> <p>Local Authorities on the front line of tackling cold homes can now apply for their share of a £25 million Central Heating Fund, the Energy and Climate Change Secretary Ed Davey has announced. The money is expected to help up to 8,000 fuel poor homes living off the gas grid stay warmer for less through the installation of complete first-time central heating systems.</p> <p>https://www.gov.uk/government/news/the-heat-is-on-to-ensure-warmer-healthy-homes-for-everyone</p>	For information	Karen Ledger, Head of Planning and Housing

COMMUNITY SAFETY		
<p>£10 million support for women facing the threat of domestic violence (9 March 2015)</p> <p>A £10 million government fund will help support refuges across the country and boost provision for vulnerable victims of domestic violence and their families. As the world marks International Women’s Day, the government has announced the 148 councils that will receive a share of the funding over the next 2 years, to support refuges in their area. Northumberland, in a joint bid with Durham, Darlington, and Redcar & Cleveland, will receive £330,000. The funding will both keep refuges open, and improve standards in existing refuges, maintaining a strong national network offering support to women at risk</p> <p>https://www.gov.uk/government/news/10-million-support-for-women-facing-the-threat-of-domestic-violence</p>	For information	

CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE		
<p>More than 105,000 troubled families turned around saving taxpayers an estimated £1.2 billion (10 March 2015)</p> <p>Eric Pickles has advised MPs that 105,671 complex families had benefited from the support provided by local authority teams by February, putting the programme firmly on track to achieve the Prime Minister's goal of turning around 120,000 by the end of the parliament. As well as getting children back into school, putting adults in employment or on a path back to work and cutting youth crime and anti-social behaviour across the whole household, the new figures showed that the programme had already saved taxpayers an estimated £1.2 billion, from a maximum government investment of £448 million.</p> <p>https://www.gov.uk/government/news/more-than-105000-troubled-families-turned-around-saving-taxpayers-an-estimated-12-billion</p>	For information	
<p>£25 million injection to help 'life-changing' children's services (25 March 2015)</p> <p>The Education Secretary has announced that vulnerable children and young people will benefit from grants to voluntary organisations. The grants will be used to reform or deliver life-changing services over the next year. After a competitive application process, the department has chosen 94 projects that will make the biggest impact on children, young people and their families. For the first time the department has separately identified mental health as a theme in the VCS grants in recognition of the significant role improvements in this area have in supporting better outcomes for children and young people. Organisations specialising in child mental health care will receive a total of £4.9 million.</p> <p>https://www.gov.uk/government/news/25-million-injection-to-help-life-changing-childrens-services</p>	For information	



Northumberland County Council

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