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Northumberland Association of Local Councils

NALC Enews 21 March 2020

Introduction

The Chairmen and Clerks of Member Councils have been sent a number of bulletins especially in the past week.

Those bulletins have concentrated on issues surrounding Coronavirus.

This bulletin has a wider circulation and is in two parts.

The first will be a brief summary of the current position as it affects the administrative work of parish, town and community councils. There are also some updates to the Bulletins.

The second will contain other information but inevitably any dates given are subject to change.

The NALC/CAN Office is closed and contact is best made via email.

There are a number of outstanding questions which arose before I

most urgent questions where I can.

The current National Emergency means that legislation and advice or guidance may change at very short notice. The contents of this Enews are as I see the position at 7.00 pm Saturday 21 March 2020.

Stephen Rickitt
NALC Chief Officer

Part One Coronavirus

The best sources of information are the following websites, given the rapidly changing understanding of the virus

<https://www.gov.uk/government/topical-events/coronavirus-covid-19-uk-government-response>

<https://www.nalc.gov.uk/coronavirus>

<https://www.newcastle.gov.uk/services/public-health-wellbeing-and-leisure/public-health-services/coronavirus-covid-19>

<https://www.northumberland.gov.uk/Care/Health.aspx#coronavirus>

My perception is that the categories of Vulnerable People have been extended on at least one occasion and may be amended again. The Govt. website has the most up-to-date details.

The Govt. site also has the information on the employment measures being implemented.

Coronavirus - Changes to Procedure

On Monday 23 March we anticipate that the Govt. will announce further legislation measures affecting the way that Councils will operate.

The national NALC and others are pressing for, amongst others,

- An extension of the General Power of Competence (GPoC) to all parish, town and community councils

Meetings

We know that many councils have postponed or cancelled meetings for the foreseeable future.

On Friday 20 March 2020 the national NALC issued the following advice

Holding meetings

NALC strongly encourages councillors and staff to follow government guidance on social distancing and self-isolation. This is particularly important if anyone is in an at-risk group as identified by the guidance. We would encourage local councils to consider if they need to hold scheduled meetings at all. The health and safety of councillors, staff and the public should be your primary concern. If local councils do follow government guidance on social distancing and social isolation and so they do not hold scheduled meetings, including annual council meetings, NALC's opinion is that the likelihood of a successful legal challenge is low.

We are expecting government guidance on holding meetings remotely early next week, and NALC will also produce further guidance next week. In the meantime, if local councils decide to not hold meetings and take decisions by email or other remote methods NALC feels it's likely that afterwards if there were a challenge that the courts will accept that exceptional times called for exceptional measures. In the absence of government guidance, we would suggest for now only taking decisions remotely for truly urgent issues. In this case, local councils should evidence their decision making as best they can, for example by asking councillors to confirm their votes by email to the clerk for the clerk to keep as a record of the decision.

Electronic Communication

successful. It is compatible with both Microsoft and Apple systems as well as other major software providers.

Once tried, members of the association have usually been pleasantly surprised at the ease of operation.

It may not be your preference and I merely pass details on for your consideration.

<https://zoom.us/meetings>

The County Council

Late on Friday 20 March the County Council sent all Councils the following

Dear Colleague,

Across the UK voluntary organisations are helping people in their local communities during the COVID19 epidemic. In Northumberland, we have strong local communities and we want to harness the power of our local community volunteers while making sure the most vulnerable residents are protected.

The council recognises the important role of the community and voluntary sector organisations in supporting people and is working to put in place a series of measures through our partnerships to help us through this challenging time.

A core strategic team has been established to support local community activity, the team are currently liaising with a variety of groups to bring together a network of key community links across the county.

With that in mind if you know any key link in your community please could you ask them to get in touch with us as the following email address

communitylinks@northumberland.gov.uk

so we can provide support, relevant information, help to signpost,

out regular updates which will share news from across Northumberland's communities and offer information from trusted sources.

Best wishes,

Northumberland Communities Together Team

Elections

The Govt. has already announced that elections for the Police and Crime Commissioners are to be postponed to May 2021.

I understand that the County Council is likely to announce that pending by-elections and Neighbourhood Plan Referendums will be postponed for the foreseeable future.

NALC nationally are pressing for casual vacancies to be included in the legislative changes.

Legal Powers

As mentioned above, the sector is pressing for GPoC to be extended to all Councils.

Please let us know as soon as possible if any Council has been unable to carry out coronavirus related activities within their community because of uncertainty over legal powers.

We can then pass details to the national NALC for use in pressing the MHCLG.

Emails to Member Councils

The Member Council Updates and NALC Enews are sent via Mailchimp. During the next week I shall be seeing if the Member

Part Two - Other Matters

The following items cover a range of issues some of which may well be superseded by events.

Briefings

Our 2020 programme of briefings has been put on hold.

As a test, I intend to use ZOOM to provide a briefing for clerks on the completion of the AGAR within the next couple of weeks.

It will be a test so please bear with us. Details of the date and time should be circulated by the end of next week.

If the trial is a success, then we hope to arrange more electronic sessions on a range of topics over the next few months.

Bus Services

Just before the current emergency, contact was made with the local operators and trade association. Individual meetings were to be arranged and will be followed up by the association as soon as practicable.

The national NALC have sent the following request for help.

The County All Party Parliamentary Group (County APPG) and the County Councils Network (CCN) are undertaking an independent inquiry into the decline of rural bus services in county and rural areas.

NALC will be responding to the key lines of the inquiry as follows:

This could include:

- quantitative analysis that demonstrates reduced funding and reduced bus services in your area, including frequency of service and number of routes in operation;
 - qualitative evidence that demonstrates the impact that this has had on social mobility and access to jobs, skills and training opportunities; the impact that this has on public service delivery.
2. The innovative practices authorities have put in place that could be scaled up across the country.

Points you may want to cover include:

- you may want to use this as an opportunity to highlight pilots or innovative schemes that you have adopted that other councils may want to consider
3. The additional powers or levers that would make the biggest difference to provision of bus services in county/rural areas.

Points you may want to cover include:

- how extending devolved bus franchising powers, including bus service operators grant, to areas other than metro-mayor areas would help to introduce new routes
- areas that the Government's National Bus Strategy should cover as a priority
- the type of bus infrastructure that could be supported as part of wider efforts to respond to the climate emergency

To help us in our response we would like to hear from local (parish and town) councils and county associations and ask that county associations forward on this email to member councils in their area.

Please send all responses to

Jessica.Lancod-Frost@nalc.gov.uk

by 17:00 on 8 April 2020.

Websites

All parish, town and community councils must be able to post documents onto a website. If the address for your website changes,

Planning Matters

The Govt has announced an intention to change the permissions to allow pubs and cafes to be takeaways during the current National Emergency

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/government-to-grant-permission-for-pubs-and-restaurants-to-operate-as-takeaways-as-part-of-coronavirus-response>

The Planning Inspectorate are making changes to public inquiry procedures

<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/coronavirus-covid-19-planning-inspectorate-guidance>

Northumberland National Park Authority is now consulting on 'Main Modifications' to its Local Plan.

The Authority submitted its draft Local Plan to the Government on 30th September 2019. It was then subject to an independent Examination in Public before a Planning Inspector, who considers main modifications are necessary to make the Local Plan sound.

Comments are now sought on these 'Main Modifications' which can be viewed online here:

<https://www.northumberlandnationalpark.org.uk/planning/planning-policy/local-plan/local-plan-consultation/>

As a result of the main modifications, an updated Sustainability Appraisal Tracked Main Modifications and Habitats Regulation Assessment Main Modifications Statement have been produced and are also to be consulted on.

The consultation is open for seven weeks, commencing Tuesday 17th March 2020 and closing on **Tuesday 5th May 2020 at 5.00pm**. Any comments submitted after this time will not be considered by the Inspector.

More information about this stage of the process, together with supporting documents is available on our website which can be found

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Making a representation

Please note the following, if making a representation on the main modifications:

- use the response form attached (guidance on how to respond is included)
- make it clear which main modification you are commenting on, by referencing the relevant modification number, starting MM.
- this is not an opportunity to make further representations regarding the Plan's content, and comments must be restricted to the proposed modifications only.

Please send completed response forms and representations to the Programme Officer. Her contact details are:

Name: Ms Margaret Anderson, Local Plan Programme Officer

Address: % NNPA, Eastburn, South Park, Hexham, NE46 1BS

Email: programmeofficer@nnpa.org.uk

The County Council will no longer be posting copies of planning applications to local councils for the duration of the National Emergency. All Councils should have received details from the Director Planning

Pavement Parking

On 12 March, the Dept. for Transport announced a consultation. Details are at

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/transport-secretary-acts-to-make-pavements-safer-for-pedestrians>

Electoral Law

The Law Commission has published a report on changes to Electoral Law

<https://www.lawcom.gov.uk/project/electoral-law/>

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***If you have any comments or observations, please contact
Stephen Rickitt, NALC Chief Officer stephenrickitt@northumberlandalc.uk***

or

Louise Currie, Community Initiatives Officer louisecurrie@ca-north.org.uk

Our website is at <https://northumberlandalc.uk/>

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