

COUNCIL 16 DECEMBER 2009**1. Local Service Provision**

- 1.1 Northumberland County Council has given a preliminary indication under the Northumberland Charter for Local Councils of some of the services that will transfer and become the responsibility of town and parish councils from 01 April 2010. It is proposing to standardise responsibilities across the town and parish councils for allotments, public seats, seasonal lighting, play areas and bus shelters.
- 1.2 Some costs have been provided but these are only a guide to what the County Council has included within its current budget for 2009/2010. The County Council will make no financial provision for expenditure on these services in 2010/11 and is therefore effectively cutting these services from the unitary authority budget. It has indicated that it will be for the Town Council to consider an appropriate level of expenditure, if any, and make provision through the precept.
- 1.3 The Charter also identifies the services for burial grounds; parks; playing fields; open spaces; public halls and community centres; town twinning; war memorials and other monuments which it expects that the Town Council will manage and finance by the precept in due course. No estimates are available at this stage but the principle should be borne in mind for future budgets.
- 1.4 Allotments are the statutory responsibility of the Town Council and have been administered on its behalf by NCC in the current financial year for the amount of the net budget provision of £6,233.50. The allotment sites at Spital and Woodhorn totalling 361 plots have been operated and managed successfully by an Allotments Association for many years. The formal lease to the association has expired although arrangements have continued on a similar full repairing basis and the annual rent needs to be reviewed as part of the budget exercise.
- 1.5 The county council has identified 87 public seats in Newbiggin although the list may not be exhaustive and expects them to be the responsibility of the Town Council from 1st April 2010 but there are no bus shelters to transfer in the initial phase. A one-off arrangement has been put in place for seasonal lighting this year and supplemented by the Town Council.
- 1.6 If the Town Council is to accept the transfer of such services and in particular the seven play areas then more detailed historic information is required to allow accurate estimates to be considered for incorporation in the budget.
- 1.7 All of the Town and Parish Councils recently established in South East Northumberland are in a similar position and arrangements are in hand to meet together early in January to consider matters arising from the Northumberland Charter for Local Services that was put in place between NCC and Northumberland Association of Local Councils.

RECOMMENDED that

- (1) the transfer of responsibility for the allotments be accepted for 01 April 2010 and the Clerk authorised to complete a new lease to the Association on similar terms at the rent to be agreed at the budget meeting;
- (2) the Chairperson Vice-Chairperson and Town Clerk attend the joint meeting with other Town and Parish Councils to consider the principles of transfer of local services from the county council.

2. Northumberland County Council – budget consultation

- 2.1 The budget report to the county council Executive highlights the reduction of costs in excess of £300,000 through transferring services to Town and Parish Councils in South East Northumberland. There are also references to closure of public conveniences in Wansbeck and low use libraries but individual locations are not identified.
- 2.2 Other areas that could impact on the Town Council are reductions in floral bedding; leisure grants; removal of SEN events budget; Wansbeck leisure trust grant; concessionary taxi scheme.
- 2.3 Public consultation is to take place over the next few weeks and locally a meeting of the Area Committee for this purpose will be held at Ashington Leisure Centre on Monday 04 January 2010 at 6.00 pm. Members may wish to attend to obtain further detail of these proposals.

RECOMMENDED that Members attend the consultation meeting.

3. Partnership Working

- 3.1 The Town Council is likely to need to work with a range of partners to improve local facilities and opportunities in the town.
- 3.2 A request has been received from the Community Arts Development Officer of Newbiggin Arts Forum Limited operating from the Newbiggin Arts Centre in Woodhorn Lane seeking endorsement of their community based work in the town.
- 3.3 The support of the Town Council to the development of the arts in the local community would not only meet some of the Council's objectives but may help access funding for further initiatives.

RECOMMENDED that the Council endorse the work of the Arts Forum.

4. Community Radio

- 4.1 The South Northumberland Radio Group based in Bedlington Front Street is a group of volunteers seeking to provide a genuinely accessible local community radio station to serve the local population and is attempting to raise £60,000 to finance the project.
- 4.2 They believe the radio station would help enhance the social cohesion of the area:
- Connect people in deprived neighbourhoods to mainstream employment, training and educational opportunities
 - Promote mental and physical health campaigns
 - Be actively involved in crime prevention campaigns
 - Assist in a variety of social welfare campaigns, such as fostering and adoption of children; care of the elderly and people with physical and mental handicaps
 - Provide a showcase for local creative talent including musicians, artists, writers and craftspeople
 - Provide a forum for debate of local issues
 - Provide a diary of sporting, recreational and leisure activities
 - Provide an "A to Z" information service to cover local activities, services and facilities

through professionally produced entertaining programmes that will include music to suit all ages and tastes, interviews with community representatives and local organisations on the FM frequency and on-line.

RECOMMENDED that Members consider the request.

5. Financial Arrangements

- 5.1 I am now able to confirm that the banking arrangements for the Town Council are at last in place with Barclays Bank plc and that the balance of the Precept for 2009/2010 £73,527.50 has been credited to the account by Northumberland County Council.
- 5.2 A number of outstanding accounts and commitments have been paid although further payments will be required for the cost of the elections and additional support from Community Action Northumberland which have not yet been finalised. An estimate of income and expenditure is attached at Appendix 1.
- 5.3 Referring to previous discussions a donation of £500 has been made to Tri Northumberland to support the successful summer triathlon event held in the town and £100 for the British Legion Poppy Appeal.

- 5.4 As part of the budget discussions the Finance Committee considered expenses incurred by Members and has made the following referral:

**CONTRACTS COMMITMENTS AND FINANCIAL ESTIMATES
FOR 2010/2011**

A discussion took place regarding expenses of members for telephone calls; broadband; printing and stationery and local travel and it was felt that an allowance should be paid as a contribution towards such expenses.

RECOMMENDED that:

(3) Councillors be entitled to claim an Allowance of £20.00 per month as a contribution towards expenses incurred in connection with the Town Council.

RECOMMENDED that the report and referral be received and approved.

Appendix 1

Expenditure to 30 November 2009	2009/10	
	Estimates	Expenditure
ADMINISTRATION	8,000	1200.00
OFFICE/MEETING COSTS	3,000	811.84
EQUIPMENT & FURNITURE	5,000	
FEES & CHARGES	1,000	
Election Expenses	5,000	
Casual Vacancy	4,000	
MEMBERS EXPENSES		
Councillors expenses	2,000	
Training costs	500	
CIVIC		
Civic Expenses	500	
Remembrance Day	100	100.00
Gardens Competition	500	261.67
Triathlon	500	500.00
Seasonal Lighting	1,500	345.00
TOTAL	31,600	3,218.51
Income		
PRECEPT		74,994
Less:		
Estimated expenditure		31,600
Actual expenditure	3,218.51	
Balance	71,775.49	
ESTIMATED BALANCE 31 March 2010		43,394