

COUNCIL 14 JULY 2010**1. Local Transport – withdrawal of Sunday and Public Holiday bus services**

- 1.1 Notification has been received from the Transport Support Manager at Northumberland County Council that the following services operated by Phoenix will no longer be supported:

Service 344: Morpeth – Cramlington

Service 447: Morpeth – Kirkhill

Service 442/444: Widdrington – Ashington – East Sleekburn - Cramlington

- 1.2 The contracts do not meet the county council value for money criteria requiring a Revenue/Cost ratio of at least 40% and a maximum of £5.00 subsidy per passenger:

Service 344/447 Revenue/Cost ratio 18% Subsidy per passenger £5.47.

Service 442/444 Revenue/Cost ratio 21% Subsidy per passenger £7.19.

- 1.3 These are not direct Newbiggin services but can be connected at Woodhorn Ashington and Morpeth. NCC has withdrawn the subsidies and the services will run for the last time on Sunday 18 July 2010.

2. Northumberland Association of Local Councils (NALC) – County Committee constitution and elections

- 2.1 At a recent Special General Meeting approval was given to amend the constitution to allow for fairer and less confusing elections to the County Committee. As part of the adoption process they were tasked with taking a number of options to member councils so they can have a say in how NALC elects members to the County Committee.

- 2.2 Examining the feedback from the Special General Meeting and from the recent survey they undertook, were set a number of challenges in revising the way we elect representatives to the County Committee. In summary they were:

- We need for a fair geographical appeal.
- We need to secure an appropriate buy-in for all areas.
- We follow the NALC principle that “all councils are equal”
- We need to reflect the special needs of the large councils
- We need to ensure that NALC representatives on “outside” bodies at county level are part of the county committee
- We need to have representation from councillors and clerks

- 2.3 The current County Committee has considered the options and over half favoured option one. They did undertake to consult with member councils, so would greatly appreciate the council’s opinion before their President and Vice-President make the final decision, so that they can arrange the election process, before the AGM. Information about the councils and the options are set out in Appendix 1.

- 2.4 NALC would like the council's opinion on:
- i. What is your favoured option, a), b) or c)?
 - ii. Have you an alternative suggestion?
 - iii. If we adopted option b) or c) should we consider further geographical split to fill the places?
 - iv. Should they select members for NALC representation on the NSP from within the County Committee?

RECOMMENDED that the Council decide on its preferred option.

3. Rural Business Survey - Northumberland County Council Economic Prosperity and Strategic Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee

- 3.1 The county council's Economic Prosperity and Strategic Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee is to consider the Rural Business Survey presented by the Centre of Rural Economy at Newcastle University and discuss its key findings at a meeting on Monday 26 July 2010 at 10.00 am at County Hall.
- 3.2 An invitation has been extended by the Chairman Councillor Castle to Parish Councils and Chambers of Trade to hear the presentations and participate in the subsequent discussion.
- 3.3 The Rural Business Survey can be seen at <http://www.ncl.ac.uk/cre/publish/researchreports/RBSReportFINAL>
- 3.4 While Newbiggin is not necessarily considered as a rural town there are common themes such as a high proportion of sole traders; micro businesses; home based working; age profile among the policy implications.

RECOMMENDED that the Council be represented at the county committee.

4. Infrastructure Planning Commission – Scoping Opinion for Environmental Statement

- 4.1 The Infrastructure Planning Commission has been asked for its scoping opinion as to the information to be provided in an environmental statement relating to a major project near Blyth.
- 4.2 The project is a proposed 100 MW Biomass Power Station at Port of Blyth and the applicant is RES UK & IRELAND LTD which requires an environmental impact assessment under the Infrastructure Planning Regulations 2009. It is referred to as the North Blyth Renewable Energy Project at a preferred site at Battleship Wharf and is defined as a Nationally Significant Infrastructure Project (NSIP) under the Planning Act 2008.
- 4.3 High quality pre-application work is the IPC's expectation of developers, and it is its top priority too. The IPC's Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) teams carry out the important work of preparing scoping opinions. These provide developers with clarity over the issues they should focus upon in their environmental impact

assessments and ensure that these important issues are given the consideration that they merit.

- 4.4 The Commission is consulting local authorities in the area and requesting any information they consider should be provided in the environmental statement.

RECOMMENDED that the Town Council consider whether there is any particular information that it would like to see included in the scoping opinion.

5. Northumberland County Council Consultation

(a) Street Trading Policy

- 5.1 The county council needs to rationalise the position relating to Street Trading throughout the county following local government reorganisation as there were a number of different regimes giving only limited control over traders. It is therefore consulting on a new policy to introduce a uniform system of street trading consent required by traders who use the public highway to sell or offer to sell goods or services including the display of goods in front of a shop.

- 5.2 There are only four options for it to consider:

- Designate all streets as “Prohibited Streets” – this prevents any street trading
- Designate all streets as “Consent Streets” – traders must obtain a Consent
- Designate a mix of specific “Consent” and “Prohibited” streets
- Designate all streets as “Licence” streets

- 5.3 The objectives of the policy to make the whole county a “Consent” area:

- To protect health
- Improve standards of food safety, health and safety and environmental management and enhance the image of the district
- Ensuring traders operate within the law and act fairly in their dealings with the public
- Preventing and protecting statutory nuisance, unsafe practices and anti social behaviour
- Set out in a fair and transparent manner, how the council intends to harmonise the terms and conditions across Northumberland

- 5.4 A copy of the draft policy is attached and Members are invited to consider whether they wish to make any representations to the county council regarding the new “Consent” policy.

(b) Statement of Licensing Policy

- 5.5 Formal consultation has commenced on a new draft policy that has been endorsed by the county council’s Licensing Committee as required by the Licensing Act 2003. Despite only adopting the current policy in April 2009 the government requires all policies to be re-published and take effect by January 2011.

5.6 The draft Statement of Licensing Policy is attached for information. It follows the provisions of the Act and Guidance including national court rulings and identified best practice. The fundamental principles and licensing objectives are:

- The prevention of crime and disorder
- Public safety
- The prevention of public nuisance
- The protection of children from harm

5.7 Unless the licensing authority receives representations from a responsible authority or an interested party it has no discretion and must grant the application.

5.8 Members are invited to consider whether they wish to make any representations to the county council regarding the Statement of Licensing Policy.

6 Northumberland Strategic Partnership – new Sustainable Community Strategy for Northumberland

6.1 An invitation to comment on the new Sustainable Community Strategy (SCS) for Northumberland has been received from the NSP which is coordinating its development for the county.

6.2 A working draft has been produced through the ongoing engagement process initiated through the Perfect 10 debates which provided four clear messages:

The SCS needs to be recognisable as relating to Northumberland;
Better tailoring service delivery to the varying needs of distinct communities;
Properly reflect the cross-cutting nature of impacts on quality of life;
Instil new ways of working that cut across different organisations, disciplines or funding streams.

6.3 A copy of the working draft is attached and is centred on six big partnership issues:

Making climate change work to our advantage
Affording equality of access and opportunity
Narrowing the poverty gap
Giving everyone a voice and influence
Supporting our young people into adulthood
Working harder together for better outcomes

6.4 All contributions will also inform the preparation of the new Local Development Framework (LDF) Core Strategy and the next iteration of the Local Area Agreement (LAA)

Appendix 1

NALC County Committee

Information about the councils

We have looked at the options and have come up with three scenarii which we hope achieve our aims. The basic information we used to produce the options was as follows:

- We used the current indicator that over 4,000 electorate defined a large council
- We are dealing with member councils with electorate between Alwinton – 79 and Blyth – 28,214, a fair range.
- From the definition above we have 16 councils in the area which have over 4,000 electorate.
 - 8 in the South East: Blyth; Cramlington; Ashington; Seaton Valley; West Bedlington; North Bedlington; East Bedlington; Newbiggin
 - 4 in the North: Morpeth; Berwick on Tweed; Alnwick; Amble
 - 3 in the West: Hexham; Prudhoe; Ponteland
 - 1 in Newcastle: Woolsington
- The split of all councils are:
 - 10 in the South East
 - 90 in the North
 - 58 in the West
 - 6 in Newcastle
- We need to accommodate 3 regional representatives from members chosen to represent NALC on NSP Board.

Options

The County Committee considered these three options:

- a) We use the NCC locality areas and have 27 people representing one locality area each and two or three from Newcastle. (For this exercise the locality area would relate to the clusters, where they exist, of local councils aligned with the Community Forum areas used by the County Council)
- b) We give larger councils one seat each on the committee which will account for 16 seats. This leaves 14 other seats for the remaining councils. These seats could then be allocated as a proportion of member councils:
 - 1 further place for the South East
 - 7 further places for the North
 - 5 further places for the West
 - 1 further place for Newcastle
- c) In a straight geographical split based on the numbers of member councils, the overall geographical split would be:
 - 2 seats for the South East
 - 17 seats for the North
 - 10 seats for the West
 - 1 seat for Newcastle

In options b) and c) we may need to give further consideration on how the geography could then be addressed in the specified Areas.

As all three options would give a fair geographical spread, we could then consider allocating representatives to the NSP from within the County Committee.

RURAL BUSINESS SURVEY

Policy Implications

There are a number of policy implications which can be drawn from these findings and these are outlined in this section.

- 1) There is strong evidence of extensive diversification amongst respondents to the survey. In part this will have been stimulated by successive EU rural development programmes. Future support programmes for rural businesses will need to recognise the extent to which owners are engaged in multiple activities and that this is a strength rather than a weakness of the rural economy and should not be penalised (for example in the formulation of business output and employment targets). The positive impact of this multi-layered activity on individuals, households, business supply chains and rural communities and the ways in which they are inter-related and mutually supporting must be acknowledged.
- 2) Consistent with demographic trends generally, business owners in the sample displayed a relatively old age profile. This underlines the importance of planning and economic development policies and programmes that encourage and enable young people to live in the countryside and create new businesses. At the same time, however, support is required for those older people who choose to remain in the workforce for longer, recognising that such behaviour may be motivated by a range of different factors and that this age group have much to contribute to rural economies in terms of skills, knowledge, experience and financial capital.
- 3) The research has demonstrated the vital role of in-migrants in starting new businesses in the rural North East, particularly in those sectors in which locals are less likely to be found. Planning policies that seek to severely limit new house building or to restrict it to meeting the needs of those defined as local may be misplaced. Business support providers must recognise the varying motivations of in-migrant business owners and the different resources and talents that they bring to the economies in which they choose to settle.

- 4) Home based working is becoming increasingly important in rural areas of the North East. Again it is important that planning policies do not unduly restrict these activities and rather set out to make it easier for people to work from home, particularly given the positive impacts in terms of reducing journeys to work and, for example, in providing a flexible employment option for those with caring responsibilities. Whilst such businesses may not always be seeking to grow, they have the potential to generate new income flows, especially since the business owners are likely to source their supplies locally. Further research is needed to explore the activities in which these owners are engaged and their motivation for setting up the business to inform the design of support programmes tailored to their particular circumstances.
- 5) The survey demonstrates the significantly increased reliance of businesses on the internet and broadband since the 1999 survey. Concerns have been raised by respondents over the adequacy of present provision to meet business needs in the future and ongoing investment will be required to ensure that all businesses continue to have access to fast and reliable broadband infrastructure.
- 6) Business owners placed considerable importance on good transport and communication links alongside the beauty and quietness of their location. Even given the increasing role of broadband and home working, it is likely that these factors will continue to be important in the locational decisions made by entrepreneurs in future. Investment in rural infrastructure, but also in maintaining and enhancing the quality of the region's landscape and environment, will be critical if new in-migrant business owners are to continue to be attracted.
- 7) Rural businesses appear to favour the use of private sector sources of advice. Business Link was nevertheless also accessed by a good number of respondents, often for funding to support business start-up, expansion and investment. It is important that all business owners, irrespective of their size and location, are aware of and have access to a range of support, advice and training from different providers. These providers should be aware of the differing motivations and growth plans of business owners. A business that is not planning extensive growth still has a critical role to play in the economic and social vitality of the rural community in which it is located. It may be possible to work with and through existing business networks and associations to improve awareness of the support that is available.
- 8) The survey revealed that many business owners had engaged in some form of innovative activity, most of which could be described as small-scale. It is important that national policies and programmes do not overlook such incremental changes and that they encourage rural businesses to work more closely with the regional and national 'innovation system' (including business support providers and universities) than is currently the case.
- 9) Finally, survey respondents clearly felt that their access to and awareness of national and regional support programmes and policies could be improved. One response to this would be more effective rural proofing of such programmes to ensure they are as accessible and applicable to businesses in remote rural areas as they are to those in more accessible rural and urban locations. This should apply to short-term measures, such as those put in place to deal with some of the financial impacts of the recession, as well as long-term support programmes.