

Minutes of the meeting of the Harrogate Branch of Yorkshire Local Councils Associations held at the Harrogate Borough Council Offices, Crescent Gardens, Harrogate on Monday, 3 October 2016 at 7.00pm.

PRESENT

Cllr S Fawcett (Chairman)
Ms A Pulman
Cllr P Palmer
Cllr T Whitney
Mr T Grant
Cllr E March
Cllr G Archer
Ms N Heavisides
Cllr I Andrew
Cllr M Leather
Cllr V Blackburn
Cllr P Perry
Cllr L Powell
Cllr K Blythe
Cllr J Mann
Cllr M Holt
Cllr D Bishop
Cllr J Newberry
Cllr Siswick
Cllr D Tanner
Cllr N Waller
Ms J Richardson
Cllr M Bosworth

Spofforth with Stockeld Parish Council
Arkendale, Coneythorpe & Clareton Parish Council
Asenby Parish Council
Bewerley Parish Council
Bilton in Ainsty Parish Council
Birstwith Parish Council
Boroughbridge Town Council
Boroughbridge Town Council
Green Hammerton Parish Council
Green Hammerton Parish Council
Killinghall Parish Council
Kirkby Overblow Parish Council
Knaresborough Town Council
Melmerby & Middleton Parish Council
Pannal and Burn Bridge Parish Council
Pateley Bridge Town Council
Roecliffe and Westwick Parish Council
Roecliffe and Westwick Parish Council
Roecliffe and Westwick Parish Council
Tockwith with Wilstrop Parish Council
Tockwith with Wilstrop Parish Council
Tockwith with Wilstrop Parish Council
Weeton Parish Council

IN ATTENDANCE

Sheena Spence

Chief Officer, YLCA

APOLOGIES

Cllr R Lynn (Vice Chairman)
Cllr S Truman Davies
Representatives
Cllr D Oswin
Cllr J Leggett
Representatives

Killinghall Parish Council
Darley with Menwith Parish Council
Darley with Menwith Parish Council
Pannal and Burn Bridge Parish Council
Pateley Bridge Town Council
Skelton cum Newby Parish Council

PRESENTATION BY NIGEL SMITH AND DEBORAH FLOWERS, NYCC

The Chairman welcomed the two representatives from the Area 6 highways office for North Yorkshire County Council. Nigel explained that although he had worked for a number of years for NYCC he had only been at the Area 6 office for three weeks and that he had previously managed another area office. Members were also informed that Area 6 has a new maintenance manager who is Nick Preston and that he also manages the Selby area in respect of maintenance.

Nigel gave general information about the Area offices in that there are 7 of them in the county and they comprise commercial, network and strategy, highway operations and a lighting unit. He stressed that in terms of highway improvements, due to the much reduced budget for this area of work, the first course of action would always be for the maintenance managers to assess whether the highway can be repaired before more major remedial work is undertaken. He also enforced that the Council will prioritise accident prone areas rather than areas where an accident might occur.

In terms of other responsibilities of the Area offices, these are being part of the emergency response service, being involved in highway issues in the planning process and involvement in traffic management where the officers help co-ordinate and minimise disruption.

For the next financial year there is a planned network maintenance programme for the whole county of circa £30m. Additional to this is a smaller scale maintenance programme for problems such as potholes. Nigel stressed that the highway authority has a duty to keep the network safe and explained the Highways Act 1980 in respect of the need to reduce liability to third party claims.

He reported that NYCC is trying to maximise potential funding for the road network. It has received an additional £7m from Government part of which is specifically for roads in the Harrogate area.

Deborah Flowers explained her role as the Area 6 office communication manager. Parishes were asked to appreciate that there are approximately 2,000 service requests to the office per month and

that this workload did lead to delays. She apologised that some councils feel that they do not receive a response to a request within a reasonable timescale. She encouraged use of the highways portal for members of the public and informed the meeting that a parish and town council portal was being constructed. Members expressed concern that the office will not take phone calls direct and Deborah confirmed that all contact via this method had to go through the customer service centres.

Various questions were asked. A number of councils had seen surface dressing done on roads that appeared not to need it or were very rarely used and Nigel explained that surface dressing is to help prevent water penetration. He also explained that some funding streams were awarded specifically for certain categories of roads and this money had to be spent only for what it had been given and this is the reason why some roads that seem to not need work get attention and those that are needier do not.

Pannal and Burn Bridge PC raised the matter of the filling of potholes and the timescale for remedial work to be carried out. Nigel confirmed that if the hole is an emergency issue and a danger to highway users it would be filled immediately. If the hole is dangerous, the highway decision making matrix would be used by officers to decide the priority of the repair, although he did add that the purchase of new equipment is helping with efficiency in this regard. The representative from Melmerby and Middleton PC encouraged the officers to listen to what local people are saying after an issue with surface dressing resulted in flooding in the village. Nigel informed those present that the county council had a new contractor and such situations should improve.

Budget concerns were raised by representatives; particularly that £350,000 was used for the Tour de Yorkshire event when there are highway issues that need attention. Nigel explained some of the economic benefits that expenditure of the money had brought into the Yorkshire area. He added that the Council has to make more cost savings and was speaking to the main contractor to see how that could be done under the current long term contract.

There were a number of parish specific issues which Nigel agreed to deal with directly.

The Chairman thanked the representatives for their attendance and said that it had been encouraging for better relationships between the parishes and the area office in the future.

19/16 **MINUTES**

RESOLVED

That the minutes of the meeting held on 5 June 2016 be confirmed and signed by the chairman as a true and correct record.

20/16 **JOINT EXECUTIVE BOARD**

The Chief Officer was asked to report from the July meeting. Members were informed that this had been the annual meeting and that Cllr Dr John Dunford had been re-appointed as Chairman of the Board, with Cllrs Shirley Fawcett and Derek Liddell as Vice-Chairmen.

RESOLVED

That the minutes of the Joint Executive Board meetings held on 9 April be received.

21/16 **WORK OF THE YLCA AND NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF LOCAL COUNCILS**

The Chief Officer gave a verbal report on the work of the Associations over the last four months. She highlighted the number of written and telephone casework advice requests received and dealt with by the office since the last meeting of the Branch. Two editions of WRU have been produced and circulated to members along with a variety of e-mails to member councils on assorted topics.

The Associations have also continued to promote the Digital Transparency Fund to those parish councils eligible to apply for funding from it and 32 councils have successfully drawn down funding from it since the Branch last met. The Associations have drawn down more funding than any other county association and the Associations have been represented at a meeting of the Transparency Fund Board.

Since 5 July the Associations have delivered 18 different training courses of topics such as workplace pensions, employment law, finance, induction for new clerks and the basic introductory course for new parish and town councillors. A Local Councils Award Scheme training event was also arranged for those involved with assessing applications. Much work also went into planning the proposed

conference at Scarborough from 28 October to 30 October. A strong programme was prepared but the conference has now been cancelled due to a lack of interest.

Work to progress the Internal Audit Service of the Associations has continued and internal auditors are now being recruited so that they can be made available to member councils in due course.

Amongst other events the Associations have been represented at Yorkshire Day, various committee meetings of the National Association of Local Councils (NALC) and a meeting of the Northern Group of county associations. The Associations have also participated in a NALC Devolution Task and Finish Group conference call, a NALC Legal User Group meeting and both Cilca Operations Group and tutors' meetings.

Nationally the priority for the National Association of Local Councils is making sure that the Government does not introduce a referendum requirement on parishes proposing to raise their precepts. The Government's current consultation document is proposing placing such a requirement on parish and town councils with a Band D precept higher than that of the lowest charging district council for 2016/17 (£75.46), and which have a total precept for 2016/17 of at least £500,000, while taking account of transfers of responsibilities, and that consideration is given to the extension of referendums to all local precepting authorities. The Chief Officer reminded representatives that YLCA has circulated notice of this consultation in WRU, which they all should have seen, and will be sending out further information to member councils encouraging them to respond to the consultation to oppose any such requirement being imposed.

22/16 **CURRENT ISSUES FOR LOCAL COUNCILS**

Transparency Funding: changes to eligibility criteria and assessment of funding allocated

The Chief Officer provided an outline of the Digital Transparency Fund available to councils with an annual turnover not exceeding £25,000 and explained a change to the eligibility criteria which enables councils whose normal turnover is less than £25,000 but who have a one off project which results in the turnover exceeding that amount, to continue to apply for grants from the Transparency Fund. She also reminded members that councils that applied in the last financial year could apply again for certain aspects of funding.

Workplace pensions and Auto-enrolment

The importance of councils being aware of their staging date and responsibilities was reinforced again, as it has been at the last few Branch meetings. It seemed that the councils present had taken appropriate action in this regard.

Local Government Finance Act 1992 – requirement for local councils to produce an annual budget

The Chief Officer highlighted the requirement within the Finance Act for local councils to produce an annual budget to provide justification for its precept demand to the District Council.

Copying of Planning Documents – NALC Legal Topic Note 60, implications for local councils

The Chief Officer highlighted the advice to councils which has been included in the recent edition of White Rose update regarding the legal implications of 'copying' of planning documents. She reported that YLCA was in the process of liaising with principal authorities in the area to secure blanket cover for parishes.

23/16 **OPEN FORUM FOR LOCAL ISSUES**

Questions to the external auditor

A number of members had noted that PFK Littlejohn Ltd had been particularly vigilant with external audit questions this year. The Chief Officer reported that this seemed to be a common issue in North and West Yorkshire where this company was the internal auditor for all local councils and parish meetings. She reminded members that this is the last year of the Littlejohn contract and that this might be an influence on the questioning.

Replacement of cheque signatory

Bewerley PC expressed concern that it was experiencing a good degree of difficulty replacing a signatory that had passed away. A number of members also concurred that the changing and replacing of signatories was not an easy or swift task.

24/16 **TO AGREE A SPEAKER IF REQUIRED**

RESOLVED

That the Branch invites someone who can speak about the aspirations for the Northern Powerhouse, someone who can give an update on the local incinerator development or a speaker on car parking in the Borough. The Chief Officer was asked to make arrangements accordingly.

25/16 **DATE OF NEXT MEETING**

RESOLVED

That the 2017 meetings are held on 20 February, 5 June and 2 October 2017.

It was agreed, due to the lack of heating in the Crescent Gardens Chamber, to hold the February meeting at Knaresborough or Boroughbridge. The Clerks of these councils offered to help to find a suitable venue.

There being no other business the Chairman thanked those present for their attendance and declared the meeting closed.

Chairman..... Date.....