



# NEWSLETTER

No.107 - April 2006

## MESSAGE FROM THE CHAIRMAN

Although we like to feel that as Executive Committee members we are readily accessible to our members, to date I have not received any reaction to the points I have made in this Newsletter since becoming Chairman of the Association. It may be that you wholeheartedly support the views and comments expressed and so have not thought to get in touch, but I should be particularly interested in receiving comments from elected councillors - if nothing else it will assure me that the Newsletter is hitting the spot and providing some valuable information.

There continues to be a number of activities taking place regionally that have impact on the lives of Cheshire people. The Regional Economic Strategy was officially launched by the NWDA (North West Development Agency) at the end of March. A Government White Paper setting out proposals for the reorganisation of local government is to be published mid year and further consultations by the Regional Assembly are underway on the Regional Spatial Strategy. All these activities will have an impact on town and parish councils which the Association will address in due course.

We have been successful in securing some financial support for IT equipment for parish councils through our involvement with the Change Up programme (*a Government initiative aimed at supporting infrastructure organisations and the front line organisations they serve to raise standards and capacity*). In total we had £4k for equipment to help with initiatives that encourage participation and contact with the community. If you have unmet IT needs then it might be useful to let the County Office know so that we can be better prepared to respond if future opportunities present. The Association has also been helped through the programme with updated software and equipment which, among other things, has enabled us to produce this newsletter in PDF format - progress I hope you'll agree.

Roger Parkin  
County Chairman

## **SECTION 137 EXPENDITURE: LIMIT FOR 2006/07**

A timely reminder as we come up to the beginning of the new year - the multiplier for S137 for the 06-07 financial year is **£5.44**.

*(This is the amount that results from increasing the amount for 2005/06 (£5.30) by the percentage increase in the retail prices index between September 2004 and September 2005, in accordance with Schedule 12B to the Act.)*

## **COMMUNITY EMPOWERMENT AWARDS**

Those of you that read Local Council Review or subscribe to the Direct Information Service may have noticed the above awards. The Commission for Rural Communities has now launched the awards for best practice in town and parish councils across four categories.

If your council is involved in any of these areas, or you know of good practice in your community that you believe should be recognised, it is worth entering as the Regional Winners will receive £250 and the National winners £750.

The categories are...

- Housing
- Young People
- Older People
- Gypsies, Travellers and Migrant Workers

Apart from the financial reward, all regional winners will be invited to participate in an experience sharing session at the NALC Annual Conference in September this year.

Winners will also become "champions of best practice" in their category and will be supported to actively share their knowledge and experience with others as part of an education network.

For further information, as well as an application form, log onto [www.nalc.gov.uk/liverpool2006/awards/index.html](http://www.nalc.gov.uk/liverpool2006/awards/index.html)

## BANKING SURVEY - your help needed!

As April dawns and we turn our minds to all matters financial, please take a moment to help us develop a picture of Parish and Town Council banking arrangements (in Cheshire).

It would be very useful to know:

1. Who you bank with
2. What's good about your current arrangements
3. What problems have you had (changing signatories for example).

We don't need to know who you are but it would help to have an unbiased picture of what works and what doesn't.

Please reply to Susan Harding using the County Office contact details at the bottom of the page or directly at [susanharding@btopenworld.com](mailto:susanharding@btopenworld.com)

## DESIGN AND PRINT (of parish plans)

If you are looking for help with the design and printing of your councils' parish plan you might consider having a word with NMC Design in Winsford. NMC Design is unique among design and print companies in that it operates as part of the NeuroMuscular Centre based in Winsford. Established in 1990 the centre is a charity offering a range of services to people with muscular dystrophy (md) and other allied conditions throughout Cheshire and the North West of England.

The studio is a supportive working environment managed and run by people with md competing for business in the open market, but the big difference between NMC and other companies is that all NMC's profits are ploughed back into the charity.

If you would like to find out more look at NMC's web site at [www.nmcentre.com/design](http://www.nmcentre.com/design) or contact Alan Mottram on 01606 863464 or 07714 701089. Alan has told us that he would be only too happy to meet any Parish Plan Group for an informal chat about their requirements.

## .... and ... Parish Councils as Trustees

Please let us know if your Council is involved with local charities (for example, trusteeships or even the Council being the sole trustee). If you have anything to share on this issue please contact Jackie Weaver (details below).

## RURAL CRIME - ON-LINE SURVEY RESULTS

You may remember that, towards the end of 2005, Commission for Rural Communities commissioned an on-line survey focussing on the issue of rural crime.

The survey ran for two weeks, and by the time it was closed on 9 December, 635 complete and partial responses had been received from Town and Parish Councils in 23 different counties across England.

The survey generated some very high quality data, and this has been fed into a larger research study that is helping the Commission for Rural Communities to support Councils and other agencies more effectively on crime and disorder issues.

The survey results are now available at [http://www.zoomerang.com/reports/public\\_report.zqi?ID=L22GWMZ32FU3](http://www.zoomerang.com/reports/public_report.zqi?ID=L22GWMZ32FU3). This website presents summary information on how survey participants responded to each question within the survey, but individual responses cannot be accessed for reasons of confidentiality.

Of the 635 survey participants, ten names were chosen at random to receive a copy of the brand new edition of 'Local Council Administration' by Charles Arnold-Baker - in Cheshire the lucky winner was Helsby Parish Council (*well done Helsby!*).

## New ... New ... New ... New ... New ... New ... .. Internet Web Reporting Form for Damaged Bus Stops and Shelters within Cheshire

Many staff in the District and Town/Parish Councils receive reports regarding damaged bus stops and shelters from the general public. As you'll be aware, all bus stop and shelter repairs are co-ordinated centrally by the Policy and Projects Team at Transport Co-ordination (Cheshire County Council).

The new web based form that has been produced, captures the most relevant information that Policy and Projects Team need to action any requests received. The new form can be accessed using the below link, which can be found on Cheshire County Councils internet pages:

<http://www.cheshire.gov.uk/roads/FaultForm/BusShelterFaultReporting.htm>

## HOME FIRE SAFETY CHECKS

Cheshire Fire and Rescue Service offers a free service to carry out a home fire safety assessment and fit free smoke alarms to all Cheshire residents, to raise awareness of home fire safety and prevent fires in the home.

A visit from the Fire Service takes about half an hour. During the visit they give friendly advice and recommendations on how to make your home safer, what to do in the event of a fire, and what to do if you are trapped by a fire. During the visit, free smoke alarms will be fitted on each floor, if they are not already in place.

Most fires in the home can be prevented, and by following the basic guidelines they give, you can make your home safer. Fitting a smoke alarm can save your life, as it is an early warning device that detects smoke at the earliest stages of a fire – it can give you those valuable minutes for making a safe escape. It is worth remembering that smoke does not make any noise.

As part of the visit, they discuss what to do in the unfortunate event of a fire, when the smoke alarm wakes you up in the middle of the night. Nobody expects to be in this situation, but if you have discussed beforehand with all members of your family what to do, you will have a greater chance of you all making a successful escape. They also go through the “worse case scenario” of what to do if your exit routes are blocked and you are trapped upstairs.

This sounds like scary stuff, but house fires do occur. In Cheshire last year there were 799 house fires.

Most of their information is straightforward, practical and commonsense, but just being prompted about fire safety in the home, is what most people need to actually take action and put measures in place to prevent it from ever happening to them.

If you want further information, contact Jan Hanby (contact details below) and she will be happy to tell you more.

*Jan Hanby - Community Safety Advocate*

☎ 01270 254907 (Freephone - 0800 389 0053)  
jan.hanby@cheshirefire.gov.uk

## ‘Well-deserved’ OBE for NALC’s former chairman

NALC was delighted to announce that its former chairman, Cllr Brian Kerr, has been appointed an OBE in the New Year’s Honours list.

Brian, who still serves NALC as vice president and chairman of the finance committee, was chairman between 2000 and 2004. During his stewardship of the parish and town council movement, first-tier councils saw their role expand. Among the initiatives introduced have been Quality Status, the National Training Strategy and increased powers over anti-social behaviour. Brian also made an enormous contribution to the internal modernisation of the sector.

Brian is still chairman of Saughall and Shotwick Park Parish Council in Chester district, and has been serving the 2,500 people of the villages as a councillor since 1975. He has also served as chairman of Cheshire Community Council and the Cheshire Association of Local Councils. He was also district councillor for 12 years, until he had to resign due to work commitments. **Well done Brian!**

## CALLING NEW CHAIRMEN ....

You may well have just been elected Chairman to your Council (or have been canvassed to see if you might be interested in taking up the challenge) and are looking for a little support or encouragement in this new role. Look no further!

The *County Training Partnership* is running a Chairmanship Training Session on the evening of **Thursday 25<sup>th</sup> May** aimed at new chairmen or those wishing to brush up on their chairing skills.

The session covers:

- What do chairmen do?
- Preparing for Meetings
- The Agenda
- Rules of procedure
- Setting the scene

These sessions have very limited places available - so if you would like to reserve a place for your ‘Council’ to put a name to later please do so.

For bookings or further information contact Susan Harding at the County Office (details below).

Engaging **Communities** in Planning

Individuals and community groups in Cheshire can now take advantage of a free, professional advice service aimed at helping individuals and groups tackle local planning issues. North West Planning Aid is an independent service that has been in existence on a small scale for around 30 years; however recent funding from the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM) is enabling the service to reach and support more people who need help steering their way through often complex and confusing planning procedures but cannot afford professional fees.

Planning Aid can help individuals and groups in a whole range of situations - from providing basic telephone information or helping complete paperwork for a planning application to providing advice and guidance to those wishing contribute to their council's local development plans. Planning Aid volunteers can support clients by phone, letter or in person, depending on the nature of their enquiry, until the case is concluded. All Staff and Volunteers who provide planning advice hold professional town planning qualifications and have suitable experience - all indemnified to give advice on behalf of Planning Aid.

The funding also means that North West Planning Aid's Community Planning programme has a wide range of resources at its disposal to help support community-based activities. Examples are the provision of technical expertise for community projects with a planning, regeneration or environmental element, or planning and facilitating a community consultation session. Capacity building is high on our agenda and we can provide sessions or events for community and other groups to help them understand and influence planning in their areas. The service has also developed an educational pack for primary schools to help children learn more about how their towns and neighbourhoods are shaped and developed.

To obtain advice on a planning problem or learn more about our community services call our Helpline on 0870 850 9804 or email your enquiry to: [nwcw@planningaid.rtpi.org.uk](mailto:nwcw@planningaid.rtpi.org.uk).

## COMMUNITY BEST PRACTICE

Cheshire County Council are hosting a Community Best Practice Event in the Queen's Hotel in Chester (directly opposite the Rail Station, so easy to get to by public transport at that end) on 11<sup>th</sup> September this year.

They are looking for examples of best practice from any community organisations. If any of your organisations have examples that they (or you) are particularly proud of, please get in touch with Gaynor Bowen-Jones, Rural Development Manager at Cheshire County Council on 01244 603373.

This event is open to Parish and Town Councils as well as the voluntary sector, therefore if you have projects that helped your community or indeed your council to deliver better to your community, that can be included as well.

In addition to having stand space available for successful organisers, there will also be some opportunities for presentations of best projects.

### Local councils: Local Vision Conference, Hotel Russell, London, 1-2 June 2006: ... Book Now!

NALC will be holding a two-day conference on the important role the first tier has to offer within the current political agenda at the prestigious Hotel Russell in London.

Day one will concentrate on the topic 'why neighbourhoods matter', with key contributions from the key players in central and local government. Day two will consider the themes around 'together we can', with key addresses, case studies and spotlight sessions on how we can address some of the challenges we currently face.

Speakers have been confirmed from the Lyons Inquiry, the Improvement & Development Agency, the Electoral Commission, the ODPM, the University of Gloucestershire and the NALC Council of the Year. A full programme and list of speakers is coming soon. For a booking form and further information please go to <http://www.nalc.gov.uk>



## ENCLOSURES

**Training Programme** - *details of training sessions offered by Cheshire Training Partnership. For additional copies contact Susan Harding using the contact details below.*