



NEWSLETTER

No.119 - March 2008

CHAIRMAN'S MESSAGE

I would like to draw to your attention two important matters which have been addressed by the Association since the beginning of the year which affect town and parish councils.

A few days before the County Council were to approve their final budget for the year 08/09 we learnt of the proposal to withdraw financial support for the Regional Development Post, together with the contribution towards the additional support provided by the Chief Officer. If this support had been discontinued then the Association would have had to significantly reduce the provision of full working day coverage and the community development and quality council support work that we currently offer.

As a result of strong lobbying by the Association the County Councillors were persuaded to reinstate their financial support. This will ensure we have sufficient resources to undertake the many tasks which will arise as the new unitaries are established and as we seek to secure the best possible opportunities for the town and parish councils of Cheshire. A full report is on page 2, thanks to David Norbury for that article.

The Association is now actively taking steps to meet with senior officers and political leaders in the transitional councils. We recognise that with so much to do and the restricted time available that there is a risk that the interests of town and parish councils may not receive the attention deserved. The role of the Association is to offer to help the embryo unitaries, now that the decision has been made to establish them, in their efforts to engage with town and parish councils.

The Association, as the Secretariat for the North West Federation of Town and Parish Councils, arranged a meeting with the Chief Executive of the NW Regional Assembly last month. The Cheshire Association has become increasingly concerned that whilst the Federation has had two seats with voting rights we had not been able to make a proper contribution to the work of the Assembly. We have learnt that the NW Regional assembly will be wound up at an EGM in May and a replacement entity with different responsibilities launched at a Conference in Liverpool in July. We will be monitoring this development but will continue in our efforts to ensure that the interests of town and parish councils in Cheshire, Cumbria, Lancashire and Merseyside are represented.

ROGER PARKIN - County Chairman

Cheshire Association of Local Councils

2008 ANNUAL MEETING

*Middlewich Civic Hall
Thursday 23rd October 6.30pm*

Have YOUR Council's voice heard!

We aim to make this our liveliest and most interesting
AGM to date ... with **YOUR** help.

*Booking Form and further information available from
Susan Harding (contact details below) or at
susanharding@chalc.org.uk*

THE CHESHIRE ASSOCIATION OF LOCAL COUNCILS

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LOBBYING SUCCESS!

Swift and decisive lobbying at the highest levels brought success for the County Association.

Two separate campaigns were launched at short notice to influence budget proposals by both Cheshire County Council and Chester City Council.

Only 72 hours before the County Council was due to agree its budget for 2008/09, it emerged it was likely that a £35k grant to the Association would be reduced by 50%.

The Chairman, Cllr Roger Parkin, and Chief Officer Mrs Jackie Weaver, aided by myself (Chester Area secretary - David Norbury), set to work arguing with key members of the Conservative administration that the grant should be paid in full.

All Conservative members were provided with a briefing and influential members of the Labour and Liberal Democrat groups were asked to give their support, which was forthcoming.

A lobby was mounted at County Hall on the morning of the budget meeting with the Chief Officer gaining access to the Conservative room and the Chairman and Chester Area secretary patrolling the Council Suite.

Ahead of the commencement of the council meeting, indications were given the lobbying had been successful and this was confirmed in a vote later that day observed from the public gallery by Roger Parkin, Stuart Hulse and Eddie Jenkins.

In Chester District, the Association was concerned to learn the new Conservative administration did not propose to make any further progress in increasing grants to individual Parishes to deal with the double rating anomaly.

Area Chairman Cllr Vera Roberts with Cllr Parkin in his role as area vice chairman and

the area secretary similarly contacted key members of all political groups with Cllr Parkin and the secretary again attending the council meeting.

A decision was reached to increase the budget by £15,000 to provide an additional 25p per head support in parished areas towards qualifying expenditure.

"I am very pleased indeed the Association was able to bring pressure to bear to ensure the Association and parishes in Chester District were not disadvantaged by these budget proposals," said Cllr Parkin.

"As a result of our efforts, we were able to safeguard £35,000 for the Cheshire Association and secure an additional £15,000 of funding for parishes in Chester District."

MAKING LOCAL CONNECTIONS NALC CONFERENCE 20-22 MAY 2008 Winter Gardens - Eastbourne

For the first time ever, delegates attending this year's NALC annual conference and exhibition will be able to question the secretary of state for the Department of Communities and Local Government, Hazel Blears MP, on any subject they like.

If you have a 'burning' issue in your local community such as planning, housing, environment, crime and social disorder, you can put that point to her on your local people's behalf. All you have to do is book for the NALC conference, www.nalc.gov.uk/conference, to get this vital opportunity.

It does not stop there; you can also discuss similar matters with the two shadow secretaries of state (Eric Pickles MP and Julia Goldsworthy MP) and Dr Stuart Burgess (Rural Advocate and chair of the Commission for Rural Communities).

NALC will host its premier annual conference and exhibition at the Eastbourne Winter Gardens on 20-22 May 2008. This will be the largest event in the UK local community calendar, so do not miss out on this opportunity.

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NALC realises that this is such an important event for parish and town councils; it is doing everything in its power to encourage people to come along. So despite rising costs it has kept the delegate fees the same as in 2007.

This high-profile event will bring together over 500 local council clerks, councillors and county officers over the three days of conference, to share experiences and learn about new developments in the sector.

The theme of this year's conference is 'Making Local Connections'. What really matters to parish and town councils is influencing what is happening in their local areas. This conference is all about this. It will show how councils can empower themselves to be a strong voice for local communities and bring about real positive change for local people.

Delegates will have the opportunity to question key speakers from organisations involved in the sector, as well as getting perspectives from councils on the ground.

There will be sessions held on the Power of Well Being, Local Area Agreements and Strategic Partnerships, Promoting Effective Performance and much more. There will also be the opportunity to learn from other council's experience in formal best practice sharing sessions, and networking throughout the weekend.

Member Councils are invited to submit motions for discussion at the National Conference on **Wednesday 21 May 2008**. Whilst the Conference has no policy making functions, all motions discussed and passed will be reported to the National Associations Policy Committee. Amendments to motions will not be permitted, either prior to or at the motions session.

All motions should be sent to Katie Bannister, Conference Officer, NALC, 109 Great Russell Street, London, WC1B 3LD or at katie.bannister@nalc.gov.uk by no later than **Friday 18 April 2008**

QUALITY SCHEME LATEST

Following the receipt of feedback in November and December (many thanks for your help on this) changes have largely been agreed based on the feedback but further clarification on a couple of points is still required. An update will be available in due course.

Although the National Stakeholders noted that feedback had shown a small majority in favour of an 80% electoral mandate test, compared to 67%, they felt that it was important that the test mirror that of the Well Being power. Therefore it was agreed that the electoral mandate test should reflect the test for Well Being so it is likely that it will be 67% although we are awaiting clarification from DCLG on this and I'll confirm shortly. This will be for both accreditation and re-accreditation.

It was agreed that councils should be required to show evidence that they are working proactively to support democracy and citizenship in the local area. This covers more than just election time and could include any initiatives that help to promote democracy or citizenship. This could include pieces in newspapers, media work, posters at election time, encouraging registration, talks at the local schools, youth engagement in decision making, informing hard to reach groups etc. It won't be a complicated test and we will be providing guidance as to the kinds of activities that would be appropriate but we would like to keep this test fairly broad to encourage many different kinds of activity.

Other points where agreement was reached included:

- councils should have both an email address and website. It was also agreed that as these would be moving from the discretionary section two new discretionary options should be added to compensate. One of these is likely to be a community engagement strategy, the other an online blog or forum.
- section 12(2) of the Code of Conduct should be included in the Code of Conduct test.

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- councils should be required to have adopted the National Framework on terms and conditions for clerks and deputy clerks. It was also agreed that councils should be required to provide a statement that they have provided all staff with written contracts of employment.
- councils should be required to provide a statement of intent on training. It was felt that a strategy may be too onerous for some councils, however, councils will be required to show that they have acted on their statement at reaccreditation.
- there should be greater flexibility on how councils get newsletter information out to local people. Therefore it was agreed that community newsletters would be appropriate if all the relevant information is included.

The tests are also being streamlined where appropriate. Councils will no longer be required to provide the register of attendance recording apologies. Councils will also be required to ensure draft minutes of their meetings are available for inspection within two months of the meeting taking place. This was in order that minutes could be agreed at the following meeting where necessary.

With regard to re-accreditation, councils due to reaccredit before 1 July will have until October 1 to submit their portfolios. The July 1 date takes into account the three months grace period (purple guide p21). It is currently proposed that first time accreditations will be on the new criteria which will apply to portfolios submitted from 1 April, however, following some discussion I am hoping to arrange a period of grace for councils currently pursuing first accreditation to allow portfolios to be submitted by 30 June at the latest on the old criteria and in order that Accreditation Panels receive sufficient briefing on any new tests.

Dave Mahon
NALC DEVELOPMENT OFFICER

Clerk and Council of the Year 2008

NALC and Aon would like to invite entries for the Council of the Year and the Clerk of the Year. This hugely popular awards scheme rewards those councils and clerks who are striving to make a difference in their local communities in context of their service delivery and representation work.

The closing date for all applications is 4 April 2008. All submissions should be made to NALC/Aon Awards, NALC, 109 Great Russell Street, London WC1B 3LD.

Full details are available on www.nalc.gov.uk or e-mail awards@nalc.gov.uk

VACANCY

Holmes Chapel Parish Council
www.holmeschapelparishcouncil.gov.uk

Appointment of an Assistant to the
Clerk of the Council

Based on Local Government salary scales
- up to £4,680 p.a for 9 hours per week
Expenses paid at nationally recommended rates

For an information pack and application form:
please apply to the Clerk of the Council, David Cowgill,
clerk@holmeschapelparishcouncil.gov.uk,
Telephone 01565 631528
or 2 Arundel Close Knutsford Cheshire WA16 9BZ

Closing date: Monday 14 April 2008

ADMIN SUPPORT NEEDED ...

The Association's County Office is looking to secure 20 hours of additional admin support. If you think YOU might be interested, or would like further information, please contact the County Office for an application form.

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