



NEWSLETTER

No.124 - November 2008

CHAIRMAN'S MESSAGE

It gives me great pleasure to be writing this my first report as Chairman of the Cheshire Association of Local Councils.

These are changing times for local Government, and whilst some of us are sad at the demise of Cheshire as an administrative Authority, we should look forward to the challenges that the formation of the third and fourth largest Unitaries in the North West will bring. It is a time for radical thinking in the way that both the Unitaries and ourselves evolve. Talks have been, and are being, held with the two new authorities. These talks are already bearing fruit in that both Unitaries have indicated their commitment to supporting the local council movement. There also appears a keenness to Parish those areas which are currently unparished. This obviously bodes well for the future and will hopefully see our organisation going from strength to strength.

We have just had a very successful Annual General meeting which was well attended. It was at this meeting that I was elected chairman. This meant that after four years in office Roger Parkin stood down. Roger will be a difficult act to follow and one of my endearing memories of Roger is him and Jackie Weaver (Chief Officer) standing in the foyer of County Hall in order to lobby County Councillors. The reason being that there was a strong possibility we were about to lose the County Council funding which would have meant the loss of our Development Officer and a reduction in the overall service we are able to offer our members. This shows the commitment of Roger to the Association and the lengths he was prepared to go to protect it.

I hope that because of Roger and Jackie's stand I will not be put into such an unenviable position. To Roger I say thank you. To Jackie I hope our working relationship will be as successful. Whilst on the theme of saying thank you I would like to say a very big thank you to the Rt. Reverend Alan Chesters one time Bishop of Blackburn. As our President Alan has worked tirelessly behind

the scenes for the Association and (far be it from me to reason why) but whenever he attends an Executive meeting we are all on our best behaviour. This is borne out by his presence in the chair at the many meetings we have and all take place with a certain amount of good humour.

The next person on the thank you list is Chalky White our Parish Development Officer. Chalky is another who quietly and efficiently gets on with his work across what is the extended County of Cheshire in other words the County as is, plus Warrington, Halton and Trafford. Two new Parishes have been established in Halton, these are Halebank and Sandymoor and early next year we will see the new parish of Neston.

The Quality Council Scheme in Cheshire also owes its success to Chalky who supports the Quality Forum. Finally thank you to the 'back room staff' at Burelydam - Susan and Brenda for their sterling work in keeping the wheels turning.

I suppose I had better say something about myself. I joined Birkenhead Borough Police in 1961 as an officer later transferring to Warrington Borough Police in 1962. Lancashire took us over in 1969 and 1974 as result of boundary changes Warrington and Widnes became part of the Cheshire Constabulary. Most of my time was spent on Traffic and Motorway Patrol. In 1991 I became a member of the Support staff in the control room at police headquarters Chester and in 1993 I was seconded to Union Duties for Unison representing all Police staff in Cheshire.

Following retirement in 2003 I became a Parish Councillor in Helsby in 2004. I have been married to Jennifer for 43 years and we have three grown up Children and three beautiful granddaughters.

I have offered a little insight into who I am but during my term of office I would be delighted to find out more about you, our members. Please do not hesitate to contact me about matters of interest or concern to you affecting your Councils.

STUART HULSE - County Chairman

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BANKING CRISIS

Our national body - NALC - has met with the Director of Local Government Finance at DCLG, acknowledging that whilst the crisis is being addressed, there is still considerable concern in our sector.

While many councils have deposits with the main high street banks, many have more diverse deposits: especially larger councils, and those with major trading income, recent asset sales and so on. Many councils have also just received the second tranche of their precept and will have it on deposit. Some councils, including several smaller councils, have deposits with Icelandic banks, in one case deposits of £18,000.

DCLG have confirmed that there will be no differentiation between principal authorities and TPCs in any government response.

There is, however, no plan at this stage for specific guarantees or protection for local government deposits, other than advice and support. This is because such protection would be of massive proportion, given the size of the total deposits of principal authorities, their pension funds and all the other public bodies that would have to be covered, for example all the deposits of NHS trusts. Any such guarantee would run into hundreds of billions of pounds.

The Government believes that its recent intervention, including the loan to secure Icelandic bank deposits, will stabilise the position and should secure deposits made by local authorities, including town and parish councils.

NALC will keep us updated on any future developments but it would be particularly helpful if you could let us know of any particular problems by e-mail to the County Office in the first instance.

John Findlay, Chief Executive NALC

2008/09 NATIONAL INTERIM SALARY AWARD FOR LOCAL COUNCIL CLERKS

Some of you will already be aware of the interim settlement for Clerks Salaries for the current financial year.

As indicated in Employment Briefing E10-08 (previously circulated to member councils) the Employers' Side of the National Joint Council (NJC) for Local Government Services made a final pay offer for 2008/09 of 2.45%. No agreement has been reached and this failure to agree has been referred to arbitration by the Trade Union Side. The Employers have acceded to this request.

Given the time that has elapsed since the award was due, and the likelihood of further delays arising from the arbitration process, the two Sides of the NJC have now decided that the Employers' final offer should be implemented, with effect from 1 April 2008.

Both the National Association of Local Councils (NALC) and the Society of Local Council Clerks (SLCC) jointly recommend that the interim award based on this decision by the National Joint Council for Local Government Services is implemented with immediate effect. A further briefing will follow once the arbitration process referred to above is complete indicating the implications (if any) on the award affecting salaries in 2008/09.

Any member council requiring sight of the new figures for the individual Spinal Column Points (SCPs) may request an electronic version by e-mailing Susan Harding at susanharding@chalc.org.uk.

If you would like assistance with this or any other employment matter, please e-mail Jackie Weaver at jackieweaver@chalc.org.uk.

NEW PLANNING RULES

New planning rules designed to allow homeowners in England to extend and improve their properties without going through the planning system have come into effect.

The new regulations mean that the majority of homeowners will no longer need to get planning permission to extend their home.

As part of the changes, the government has launched a new 'interactive house guide' to explain what is and is not permitted under the new rules. The website guides users round the planning permission rules for homes from everything at the front and back of house through to each floor inside. Users can click on the part of the house they are

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changing and a pop up explains all the new rules. Housing and planning minister, Caroline Flint MP, said: "People will find it has become much easier to convert the loft and build on an extension. The changes the government has made will mean about 80,000 households a year no longer have to get planning permission.

"In addition the changes mean that anyone who wants to put in a new driveway or parking area over five square metres will not require planning permission if they use surfaces that allow the water to soak through the ground."

In Cheshire, Parish Councils wishing to know more about the planning system in general and how the practical elements of planning are going to be handled by the new Unitary Councils in Cheshire should consider attending the two planning events organised in November:

11th November - Congleton Town Hall
Aimed at Cheshire East Councils

25th November - Fourways Inn, Delamere
Aimed at Cheshire West and Chester Councils

For further details or to book places, contact Susan Harding or Brenda Taylor at ChALC.

NW REGIONAL SPATIAL STRATEGY

A new regional strategy, which directs long-term housing and economic growth and environmental protection in the north-west, has been announced by communities minister Baroness Andrews.

A vision for sustainable social and economic development in the north-west up to 2021 is unveiled in the 'North West of England Plan'. The Plan aims to raise the economic performance in the north-west by supporting the provision of new job opportunities and reducing local inequalities.

It puts protecting the north-west's environment at the heart of new development. The Plan sets out to deliver 413,000 new homes (23,111 a year) by 2021 to meet housing needs. With people living longer and more and more choosing to live alone households are projected to grow in the region by at least 25,600 per annum to 2026.

The provision of housing is vital to supporting the growth of the north-west economy and delivering a higher quality of life to all. The largest need for

housing is in Manchester, Salford and Liverpool where there are major requirements for urban regeneration and housing market renewal. The Plan focuses growth in the three city regions of Manchester, Liverpool and Central Lancashire and identifies the regional centres of Manchester and Liverpool as the first priority for investment and regeneration, ensuring they will be firmly established as world-class cities. Other towns highlighted as priorities include Blackburn, Blackpool, Bolton, Preston and Wigan. The Plan also seeks to maximise the economic potential of the region's rural areas while respecting their character and natural environment.

Communities minister Baroness Andrews said: "The north-west needs a long-term strategy for boosting its economy, addressing housing need, and protecting the environment by tackling climate change.

"We have an ageing population with more people choosing to live alone and new households are growing faster than new homes. If more homes are not built now the housing ladder will get even further out of reach.

"The North West Plan sets out an achievable vision for reducing the social and economic disparities in the region while protecting its distinctive character and environment."

Publication of the final plan follows comprehensive public consultation and independent examination process. The Plan also provides a regional policy framework for major transport, waste and environmental issues in the North West.

The regional plan puts tackling climate change high on the agenda to support national targets to reduce CO2 by 60% by 2050 and sets out how growth will be brought forward sustainably. This includes promoting development at locations well served by public transport, the re-use of land and buildings, targets for electricity to be generated from renewable sources and interim targets for the generation of renewable energy on new development sites. A modern transport system that concentrates on the development of better transport links between the region, and between the north-west and other regions is a priority. The Plan sets out the general priorities for future investment in transport infrastructure.

Further details will be set out in an Implementation Framework to be published later this year. **DIS 694**

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SHORTAGE OF AFFORDABLE RURAL HOUSING

Nearly 700,000 people are now stuck on waiting lists for an affordable home in rural England, housing and countryside campaigners have warned.

Over the past five years, the number of people waiting for an affordable home in country areas has soared by 37%, up from 507,757 in 2003 to 695,735 last year, according to the National Housing Federation and Campaign to Protect Rural England (CPRE).

On average 14,494 people have been added to housing waiting lists in rural areas every month over the past four years while the proportion of homeless households has more than doubled.

The campaigners fear that with the younger generation priced out of the market in many rural areas, unless action is taken to address the lack of affordable homes rural communities face an uncertain future. The only way to solve the problem is to build a limited number of affordable homes in every village and rural town where a need has been identified.

Federation chief executive, David Orr, said: "Without urgent action by ministers many of our villages are in danger of becoming the preserve of the rich and weekend playgrounds for second home owners, with schools, pubs and post offices at risk of closing because of a lack of customers. Others are at risk of becoming very poor as economic activity and young people of a working age are simply squeezed out."

CPRE chief executive, Shaun Spiers, also commented: "Today's challenging housing market highlights the need for public investment to ensure rural communities receive a fair share so that they can have the homes they need. It also suggests a growing role for community-led initiatives, such as community land trusts."

DIS 694

CODE OF CONDUCT CONSULTATION

Communities and Local Government (CLG) launched its consultation 1 October 2008, for 12 weeks on issues relating to codes of conduct for local authority members and employees.

The consultation includes proposed amendments to clarify details of the members' Code of Conduct, as last revised in 2007. These amendments have been suggested by the revised

Code of Conduct's first year of operation and have the support of the Standards Board for England.

A significant proposed revision to the members' Code of Conduct covers the issue of 'private capacity'.

The consultation sets out how the government proposes to amend regulations and extend the Code of Conduct to cover those occasions where a member's criminal behaviour, in a private capacity, brings disrepute to the local authority.

Dr Robert Chilton, chair of the Standards Board for England, welcomed the launch of the government's consultation: "We welcome the continuing attention given by the government to standards in local public life. The code revisions, upon which consultation is available, deal with some of the outstanding issues around the members' Code of Conduct.

"There is a public expectation that serious misconduct in a member's private life should have a consequent repercussion on their elected role, so I welcome the chance to clarify this."

The consultation also sets out government proposals on a separate code of conduct for local government officers.

Dr Chilton added: "With regard to the prospective officers' code, we want to take a measured view around what is likely to be best for public confidence in local democracy, and indeed to consider whether there is any role the Standards Board itself could play in supporting local authorities with the practical application of an officers' code. I hope all interested parties will take the opportunity to respond to the consultation."

Parish Councils should have received copies of the Consultation document direct from the SBOE but details of the consultation can be found on the Communities and Local Government website at: <http://www.communities.gov.uk/publications/localgovernment/codesconductconsultation>

ENCLOSURES:

The following documents have been mailed with this newsletter. Please ask your clerk for a copy or contact us directly for additional copies.

Booking Form for Planning Seminars (East or West as appropriate);

Booking Form for Joint Area Meeting (East) 1st December 2008

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