

## County Council Budget – the outlook for communities

The County Council published its first tranche of budget proposals for the next financial year (2010-2011) in November. As expected, the report focuses largely on the need to reduce expenditure. Public consultation will take place in December and January.

Leaving aside the substantial expenditure on schools, debt repayments and social services which do not form part of the core budget, current estimates suggest that cuts of between £19.6million and £30 million will need to be made, on the annual expenditure. From a current core budget of £285 million, this amounts to reductions of between 6.9% and 10.5%.

The cuts are needed because of the reducing levels of government support, the reducing levels of income from investments (linked, in part, to the current freezing of

assets invested in Icelandic banks), the huge redundancy and pension costs associated with LGR (local government reorganisation) and the fact that the current year's budget was supported with the help of council financial reserves, which cannot be repeated.

The current report has identified proposals for some £15.8million in cuts, all of which are subject to consultation. A further £3.8m to £14.2m of savings will need to be identified before February. The reason for the variation in these projections is because the Government has not yet decided whether to allow the redundancy costs to be 'capitalised' (ie spread over an extended period of years). No matter who wins the next General election significant financial cuts will be inevitable.

Many of the cuts will directly impact on local communities and on voluntary organisations. Closures of libraries, public toilets, residential care homes and day centres, reduced support for leisure centres, the cessation of the concessionary taxi fare scheme, and a range of charges for council services, are all being considered.

Financial support for the voluntary and community sector, which took a serious cut this year, is facing a proposed 21 % cut of £300k next year. Many of the voluntary groups who have their own premises, (most notably, village halls and community centres) are facing the possibility of being charged for the collection of their waste.

The majority of parish and town councils will see no change in their own responsibilities. However, as planned, local councils in several parts of Northumberland will be expected to take responsibility for local services such

as festive lighting, allotments, bus shelters, seats and play areas. This will be a challenge for the relatively new councils in South East Northumberland and for Berwick Town. However, it does seem likely that all or most local councils will experience increasing requests from local community groups and voluntary organisations for financial support, as the funds of the County Council and central government become tighter.

Clearly, public sector finance is going to be tight in the years to come, even if the general economy picks up sooner. This is bound to have implications both for the provision of local public services and for the ability of the local voluntary and community sector to survive and flourish.

Copies of the NCC budget consultation documents and the consultation process can be found at:

- 06 Budget 2010/11
- 06.1 Budget 2010/11 Appendix A
- 06.2 Budget 2010/11 Appendix B

<http://www3.northumberland.gov.uk/Councillor/Meeting.asp?MID=526&Ret=T8888>



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developing and improving the relationship between the tiers, it defines and clarifies councils' roles in service-provision, it provides for a pattern of support for local councils, and it widens the range of issues and proposals on which local councils will be given a voice.

From an early stage in the local government reorganisation process, local councils demanded clarity over what was expected of them, and of what they could expect the new County Council to do. Many also called for an end to the controversial 'double-taxation' situation where council tax payers in many areas are contributing to their local councils to provide a particular service (eg parks and burial grounds) locally, and are also contributing to the principal authority's provision of a similar service elsewhere in the county.

Parish and town councils throughout Northumberland were given an update on the implementation of the Northumberland Charter for Local Councils, at four packed meetings during October and November, at various locations. Three of these meetings were run jointly by the County Council and NALC (the Northumberland Association of Local Councils) and the fourth was the AGM of NALC.

The Charter was finalised and adopted earlier in 2009, as a result of surveys and consultations with local councils and with the pre-reorganised county and district councils. It is a commitment to

In most parts of Northumberland, local councils already provide and support a range of local services and activities, such as allotments, parks, shelters, celebrations, festive lighting, etc. Where these have been run by a principal authority in the past, they will be transferred in phases to local councils. Town twinning, festive lighting and Remembrance Day services are already moving across. From next

April, the transfer of allotments, play area, bus shelters and seats is proposed. Consideration will then be given to burial grounds, commons, recreation grounds and war memorials. In addition, local councils may wish to propose the take-over of other services, which the County Council will finance.

The County Council has also published the first edition of a directory of useful officer contacts for local councils. This will enable parish councils to speak directly to the relevant staff: whether on street cleaning, rights of way, electoral matters, parish precepts or a range of other functions. This fulfils another provision in the Charter – to ensure direct communication between local councils and the responsible NCC officers.

Of course, local councils are free to do a lot more than what is covered by the Charter. As well as their direct service provision, they can mobilise and support local voluntary activity. Arguably they will have more freedom and flexibility to finance new community initiatives, during what are going to be some very lean years for the public sector, compared with other parts of central and local government. It will be important to build this thinking into local council budgets and precepts, for April onwards.

The Charter, and also the directory, are available by email from NALC at [info@ca-north.org.uk](mailto:info@ca-north.org.uk) or via our website on [www.ca-north.org.uk](http://www.ca-north.org.uk)

## B.E.S.T. step forward

At a party to celebrate the launch of community group BEST (Belford Energy Saving together) participants aged from 18 to 80 swapped their experiences of monitoring energy consumption.

The Eco-Eye is an energy monitor which clips to the mains box and measures electricity consumption each time electrical equipment is in use or on standby. BEST have provided 30 energy monitors to be used on a complimentary basis then passed onto

friends and neighbours. People making the connection that saving the planet also saves the pennies has had the biggest impact on behaviour.

Resident and BEST Co-founder Diana Herbert explained how a few simple changes have resulted in a staggering near 50% saving on their electricity bill; "Installing the Eco-Eye made us more conscious of how much energy we were using, but because we were just turning things off we weren't actually using, we didn't really miss anything."

Belford Middle School have had an energy monitor fitted which has resulted in much less energy being used as lights are only turned on when they are needed. BEST are looking to work with other residents, organisations and businesses in the village over the coming months.

Anyone wishing to find out more about BEST should contact Diana Herbert on Tel. 01668 219584.

# Community Action Northumberland AGM



Photo shows Alex Kerr being presented with a gift by our President, The Duke of Northumberland

A wide range of CAN's supporters from throughout Northumberland attended the AGM on 4 November both to hear the latest news of CAN, and to meet Rob Williamson,

the newly-appointed Chief Executive of the Community Foundation for Tyne & Wear and Northumberland. Rob gave an up-beat and optimistic picture of philanthropy and

charitable giving within the North-East, and pointed to the growing need for partnership work and collaboration, to help local communities and voluntary bodies to get through the recession.

The meeting, which was chaired by CAN President, the Duke of Northumberland, was also an opportunity to see the brand new sports and community centre in Longhoughton. During the official business of the meeting, tribute was paid to Alex Kerr who was standing down from the CAN Committee, at the end of his nine-year stint, and four trustees were re-appointed: Andrew Gooding, Sonja Bailes, Sue Ashmore and Norman Dunn. The President, Vice Presidents, Treasurer and Auditor were all re-appointed.

Copies of CAN's Annual Report for 2008-09 are available from Tower Buildings, 9 Oldgate, Morpeth, NE61 1PY

## NALC AGM

The Annual General Meeting of the Northumberland Association of Local Councils was held on Saturday 14 November in Morpeth, with President Jim Rudd in the chair. Chairman of the County Committee, Val Seddon, presented the Annual Report, and Treasurer Gillian Turner presented the audited accounts. The new membership subscription formula was agreed, in line with the recommendations. Members considered a proposed amendment

to the constitution, to increase the minimum and maximum size of the County Committee, but it was agreed to defer this, pending a more-detailed review of the constitution. Progress on 'populating' the new, geographically diverse County Committee was reported and agreed, with a range of new members joining the committee, alongside some of the longer-serving members.

Following the formal business, the meeting welcomed Mr Bill Batey, the County Council's Director of Streetscene,

who gave a clear and informative account of the new relationship between his Council and the local councils' sector.

The new County Committee will be reviewing the constitution, as well as looking at the success of the new 'geographical' arrangements, in the coming months with a view to convening an extra-ordinary general meeting in the early summer to propose any constitutional change. It is also planned to hold the AGM on an earlier date in 2010.

## New free resource for community groups

*Creating Brighter Futures Together*

The Sustainable Communities North East Initiative has created a new toolkit, to help voluntary and community groups throughout North East England. The Brighter Futures Together toolkit is a free, practical, easy-to-use website. It will help people across the region to create stronger, more sustainable communities where they live. The website is at [www.brighterfuturestogether.co.uk](http://www.brighterfuturestogether.co.uk).

It's not just about being green! It's about helping improve the lives of people across the region, with happier societies, stronger local economies and a protected environment.

The toolkit features lots of different worksheets about simple action for sustainability. There are sheets on community safety, energy efficiency, health, sustainable travel, and even starting a credit union or a community-owned shop. Many

of you may already be doing some of these activities, but you might find some that you hadn't thought of yet.

It's free to use, and we hope that lots of communities across the region will find it useful. Please visit the website. Use the worksheets, and send the link on to any friends who might be interested. Hard copies of the toolkit are available if internet access is problematic for you. Please talk to the team at CAN about this.

## Have your say on the new planning policy...

The 2008 Planning Act introduced a new planning system for applications to build nationally significant infrastructure facilities in England and Wales.

The new system covers applications for major energy generation, railways, ports, major roads, airports and water and waste infrastructure. Under the new system, national policy on infrastructure will be set out in a series of new **National Policy Statements (NPS)** which can be reviewed by the Secretary of State if there is a change in circumstances.

A new independent body, the Infrastructure Planning Commission (IPC) will examine and decide applications for new infrastructure development, using the criteria on national need, benefits and impacts set out in the NPS, and consideration of evidence put forward on **potential local effects**.

**Planning Aid** is an independent organisation that offers people the opportunity to get involved in the

development of their local areas and works with communities to help them understand and play a role in the planning process. It is working with individuals and communities to help them understand and have an effective voice in the consultation on the NPS – which closes on 22 February 2010. A series of short leaflets summarising the Statements:-

- Overarching National Energy Infrastructure Policy
- Renewable Energy Generation
- Fossil Fuel Power Stations
- Gas Supply Infrastructure
- Electricity Networks
- Nuclear Power Stations
- Ports

.... can be found at [www.nationalpolicystatements.org.uk](http://www.nationalpolicystatements.org.uk)

It is important to make your views known because once finalised, the NPS will provide the framework for future decisions by the IPC on individual applications. Issues relating to the need for a specific type of infrastructure will not be debated again. Each NPS will

be accompanied by an Appraisal of Sustainability on which comments are also invited.

The **Renewable Energy Generation Statement** may be of particular interest to local communities as two of the 5 key principles which will guide the IPC when deciding applications are:-

- Regard being given to **local impact reports** (produced by local authorities) and other matters considered relevant and important;
- National, regional and **local benefits** (environmental, social and economic) should be taken account of;

Further information is available on the DeECC website:-[www.energynpsconsultation.decc.gov.uk](http://www.energynpsconsultation.decc.gov.uk). The Government will be holding consultation events around the country on the draft National Policy Statements. These events aim to raise awareness of the consultation and encourage comments from the public.

## Ingram Village Hall



Before

Community Action Northumberland has worked with the committee of Ingram Village Hall over a number of years and was very much involved in the transfer of the hall from the church to the community.

The hall is in need of refurbishment and the committee were finding it difficult to secure funding to undertake the work. Marc Johnson from CAN and Iain Hedley from the Northumberland National Park Authority worked alongside the committee to help them develop a business plan and apply for funding.

The hall has been successful in securing £7,500 from the Community Aggregates Scheme, £20,000 from the National Park's Sustainable Development Fund and £1,000 from the County Councillor Murray's Capital Programme. To top it all

off the Ingram Show Committee made a fantastic donation of £4,000 which really shows how much the community values the hall.

But that's not all! The committee has been successful in their bid to British Gas' Green Streets programme, one of only 14 successful projects in the country. This award will enable the hall to install an air-to-air heat pump which will be powered by photovoltaic tiles/cells after restructuring the roof and fully refurbish the walls with full insulation and replace the floor. In addition to the

improvements to the hall, 20 households will receive environmental assessments and improvements related to their energy efficiency and the whole community project will be monitored for a year to assess the impact of the project overall. Ensuring that education and promotion of energy saving measures to reduce carbon footprints for now and the future is an integral element of the project.

Congratulations must go to the hall committee, the community and in particular the three committee members who gave a presentation to the Green Streets panel.



After

## A New Community Hall for Knarsdale with Kirkhaugh Parish.

By Geoff Truckle, Knarsdale with Kirkhaugh Community Association



Before



After

The inhabitants of the small communities that form the Parish of Knarsdale with Kirkhaugh are bursting with pride these days as they watch their new community hall taking shape.

Ever since 1931, when the Women's Institute raised £400 to build their own hall, the green hut, as it affectionately became known, has served as the focal point of the Parish for social and sporting events. Time took its toll however, and in the late 1990s it became clear that a replacement was needed as the hall no

longer complied with modern requirements and legislation.

The ladies of the WI agreed that the only viable way forward was for them to donate the hall site to the Community, with the necessary agreement of the family trusts that had originally provided the land. A charitable trust was formed, charged with raising the money to build a new hall and to manage it for the benefit of all.

A millennium funding bid failed, but the dedicated committee, with the support

of the Community, pressed on and were rewarded last December with a Big Lottery Fund grant of £312,000, being one of only 35 to succeed out of 1500 applicants to the Community Buildings Scheme. Over a four year period local residents had raised £27,000 and appeals to other national and local charities, together with support from our local authorities and County Councillor brought in a further £32,600.

All this effort has allowed the project to progress and, once the complicated and expensive legal side was resolved, our chosen contractor moved in during July to commence work with a planned 20 week construction period.

The new hall design was based on input from the Community, following a working party evening which produced surprising unanimity from those taking part. Their ideas were translated into practical plans by our architect and without doubt, the communal effort both in fund raising and design, scored heavily in our favour with the Big Lottery Fund adjudicators. We also received a great deal of help from Jane Hart and her team at Community Action Northumberland in the formulation of our application.

The new Hall will be multi-purpose, providing a main hall for sporting and social occasions with separate committee room and first class kitchen facilities. The Hall will have a very high level of insulation, in stark contrast to the corrugated iron and timber construction it replaces. Air source to air heat pumps are being installed as the most appropriate eco-friendly form of heating in this location.

Our pictures show the demolition of the old hall, which was removed in a single day, and the new hall as it passes its halfway stage.

## New regime for CAN News

This issue sees the new publishing timetable, which will follow a seasonal basis.

- The deadlines will be as follows:
- for the Spring issue Friday 19 February
  - for the Summer issue Friday 21 May
  - for the Autumn issue Friday 20 August
  - and for the Winter issue Friday 19 November.

Electronic bulletins will also begin with the new year, so if you would like to be added to our electronic list, please contact [sueandrew@ca-north.org.uk](mailto:sueandrew@ca-north.org.uk)



## Electronic copies of CAN News



If you want to receive electronic copies of Community News as well as, or instead of hard copies, email [sueandrew@ca-north.org.uk](mailto:sueandrew@ca-north.org.uk)

The Coalfields Regeneration Trust (CRT) is an independent grant-making body that was established in 1999 to improve the quality of life in Britain's former coalfields communities.

## Bridging The Gap

Funds up to £5,000 are available or the top 50% most deprived areas – this information is available on our website.

The Bridging the Gap programme provides small grants (between £500 and £5,000) to community and voluntary organisations in coalfields communities.

Grants can be used for a wide variety of purposes, for example, to fund equipment, community activities and events or to help your group improve its facilities or develop skills.

- Are you involved in a community group or voluntary organisation and based in a coalfield community?
- Do you need funding to help develop your activities or get a project off the ground?
- If so, and a small grant award will help you make a difference in your community then contact us at the regional Coalfields Regeneration Trust office to find out more. Applying to Bridging the Gap is simple. If you

qualify you will be given an application form with an offer of support to help you through the process.

You can also check your eligibility at [www.coalfields-regen.org.uk](http://www.coalfields-regen.org.uk)

If you would like to discuss eligibility and find out more about applying for the fund please contact us on 0191 428 5550 or email [lorna.hoy@coalfields-regen.org.uk](mailto:lorna.hoy@coalfields-regen.org.uk)

## Get walking website!

There's no doubt that walking is good for you. It's good for your heart, your lungs, and for the muscle and bone growth of your children and it's good for your feeling of wellbeing!

Walking offers a great way to help kids get the active habit. If parents express excitement about the prospect of a walk in the countryside, they are more likely to transmit this feeling to their children. It's important to treat the walk as an exploration or adventure and to go at the child's pace, no matter how often they want to stop and look at things; take treats to eat and plenty to drink; and head for some landmark that will appeal to them such as a castle, a playground, an ice cream van or a boating pond. If children experience walking as part of a fun activity they are more likely to want to go again.

So, how do you find out what is on offer? John Harris, a keen walker, got fed up with the lack of information on walks in the County. So, he decided that if he couldn't find what he was looking for – he had better create it! So [www.walkinginnorthumberland.co.uk](http://www.walkinginnorthumberland.co.uk) came into being and its website gives you all the information you need for the best walking in the County:

Details of more than 90 walks to download and print free, details of all the Northumberland walking groups, maps and walk books – plus loads more information.

Check out the website and get walking!



John Harris and Buster

## Meeting the funders in the 'fall'...



Following the first of this year's Meet The Funders events at Stannington in June a further two events were held in the autumn – in October at Tynedale Rugby Club at Corbridge, for groups in the west of the county, and in November at Alnwick Rugby Club for groups operating in the north.

The success of the introduction of a late afternoon / early evening event at Stannington in June meant that we used this timing again at our autumn events – and it was equally well received.

The Project Summary Form, that we 'tried' successfully at Stannington was used again for the autumn events. The forms helped to cut down on the amount of time that groups spent in dialogue with each funder; avoided needless repetition; gave more time for funders to give advice and information directly relevant to the project concerned; and reduced the queuing times.

In another attempt to minimise waiting times, we also tried out a 'block-booking' system where groups' attendance was spread out more evenly across the event: this appears to have worked very well. This system, coupled with the invaluable support of our Trustees at the autumn events, also meant that CAN staff were able to spend more time with each group giving advice and information as well as directing people to the most appropriate

funder(s) for their particular project. This was much appreciated – and commented upon - by several groups at the event.

A total of 78 organisations/groups booked for the two events with 69 actually attending.

Evaluation forms: had a return rate of 71%.

- Almost 82% of groups found the event useful or very useful;
- 98% rated the organisation of the event highly;
- 69% found the Project Summary Form was useful/worked well; however this varied widely between the two venues – whilst 77% had a positive experience, only 59% of groups at Alnwick felt that it had been successful.
- In relation to the recently-introduced early afternoon/ early evening timing of the events, nearly 63% found the change to be more convenient;

.... 21% commented that this made no difference to their ability to attend; .... whilst 16% felt that the timing was either worse or inconvenient.

The most widely-reported benefit of the events

was the opportunity to meet a variety of funders face-to-face, in one place, which allowed the groups to discuss their projects in detail.

### Funders attending the autumn events were

- Big Lottery
- Community Foundation
- Co-operative Group (Corbridge only)
- Greggs Trust (Corbridge only)
- Northumberland Uplands Leader
- Northumberland Coastal and Lowlands Leader (Alnwick only)
- Northumberland Coast AONB (Alnwick only)
- North Pennines Dales Leader (Corbridge only)
- Sir James Knott Trust
- Joicey Trust (Corbridge only)
- Unity Bank

Sadly, due to unforeseen circumstances, several funders who were 'booked' for the event at Alnwick were unable to attend.

The vast majority of funders found the events successful; thought that the project summary forms were a useful introduction; were happy with timing of the events; and felt that the new 'block booking' system worked well.

We will be using the results of the evaluation to help us plan the events for 2010.

The event was generously supported by Unity Trust Bank.

# District Commissioner



Northumberland Scouts are currently seeking a new line manager to oversee the effective running of Scouting in North Northumberland. This is an exciting opportunity for someone to drive Scouting forward and make a real difference in their community. Tasks include working with the existing structures to provide better Scouting for more young people and adults. The right candidate will have managerial experience and have excellent interpersonal skills. No

previous Scouting is needed as training, support and guidance will be offered. The post, with paid expenses, will involve 12-16 hours a week and is subject to a satisfactory CRB clearance. Please note this is a voluntary post. For an informal conversation please ring Andrew Teasdale 0791 300 5774

*Be prepared...to make a difference*

## What We Do

Community Action Northumberland provides a range of advice and support services for community and voluntary groups to enable people throughout Northumberland to overcome disadvantages and improve their quality of life.

These services include:

- Funding advice
- Management committee development
- Advice on constitutions, charity law and legal structures
- Support for village halls/community buildings
- Project management support
- Local regeneration
- Support for parish councils
- Employment services
- Production of community newspaper

Additionally CAN seeks to

- work in partnership to facilitate the development of new, and to support existing networks of local voluntary and community groups, in order to enable them to be a mechanism for developing collaborative work across the sector
- influence and work with decision-makers to provide, with partners, conduits for the diverse views of the local voluntary and community sector to be voiced and heard within the decision-making structures, regionally and nationally.

CAN is anxious to ensure that it effectively performs these roles and therefore operates a process of continuous evaluation. This requires feedback from our users and partners. Any comments on our performance are not only welcomed but essential to help us to make sure that we are meeting the overall needs of users and maintaining our quality standards.

CAN News will be published on a quarterly basis with the next issue due out in March. It contains useful information on sources of advice and funding, helps to alert people to changes in legislation or service provision which may affect them, and passes on ideas and news from one community to another. Contributions and items of informative and newsworthy value are welcomed. Please get in touch with the Editor, Louise Currie, at Tower Buildings, 9 Oldgate, Morpeth, NE61 1PY or email items direct to [info@ca-north.org.uk](mailto:info@ca-north.org.uk).

## New Mid-Tyne Business Forum Set To Boost Rural Business

A new organisation designed to support and sustain businesses based in rural west Northumberland has been officially launched.

The Mid-Tyne Business Forum will also help companies in and around the area build new, mutually beneficial links with each other, and will encourage members to 'buy local' wherever possible to help enhance the local economy. Plans are now being put in place for the Forum's first networking event, which will be held early in the New Year.

The Mid-Tyne region covers the parishes of Warden, Newbrough, Wall, Humshaugh, Chollerton, Birtley, Simonburn, Wark and Whittington, to the north and west of Hexham, but membership applications from interested companies outside these areas are also being accepted.

Forum committee member Samantha Burnish, who runs Bardon Mill-based soft

furnishings firm Lynnwood Interiors says: "The relationships that businesses have with their customers are more important than ever before, and the formation of this Forum is designed to grow the number and quality of relationships that companies in our area have with their neighbours.

"As well as securing new business for themselves, members can also make recommendations for trusted suppliers that they have dealt with, with a view to similar recommendations coming back to them as opportunities arise.

Membership of the Mid-Tyne Business Forum, which has been set at £30 per annum, entitles members to a range of member benefits. The Mid-Tyne Business Forum aims to replicate the success of the long-established Hexham Business Forum. For further information, please visit the website at [www.mtbf.org.uk](http://www.mtbf.org.uk) or email [info@mtbf.org.uk](mailto:info@mtbf.org.uk)

### Copy deadline for the next issue is Friday 18 February

For more information on Community Action check out the website at: [www.ca-north.org.uk](http://www.ca-north.org.uk)

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