



NORTHUMBERLAND COMMUNITY

NEWS

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GOING LOCAL AGAIN

HOW DO YOU ORGANISE public bodies and their services so that they can be efficient, effective and consistent over wide areas, while remaining responsive to the specific needs and aspirations of local areas? This is a challenge which has faced local and central government for decades, and it has grown as public sector initiatives over the years have been merged into larger - and potentially more remote - blocks.

Fresh thinking has been introduced in Northumberland, with the arrival of the Government-inspired Local Area Agreement initiative. The LAA is an attempt to break down the barriers between different organisations in the public sector, to develop new partnerships with the voluntary sector, and to combine efforts to address currently-agreed goals. These goals are wide ranging - from crime and disorder to children's services, economic development, renewable energy and health improvements. One of the goals is to achieve stronger communities. A strong community is one which not only receives the services and resources which it needs: it is also active in shaping, and in some instances providing, those services.

Different types of service and initiative are best organised at different 'levels' of community. The local neighbourhood is fine and appropriate for organising children's play facilities and providing village halls, but a wider territory is more appropriate for arranging, for example, mental health services or public transport provision. In effect, a tiered approach is needed, which allows local expression where possible, while achieving a critical mass of population for the more specialist or the inherently more expansive services. But what should be that intermediate level between the local community (neighbourhood, parish, town etc) and the whole county?

Experience in the latter part of the 20th Century showed that, for some purposes, current district council areas have fallen between 2 stools - too big for people to identify with as their own community, but too small as units for the effective organisation of modern public bodies, such as the Police, Local Education Authority, NHS Trust etc.

The National Communities initiative, which is part of the Local Area Agreement process in Northumberland, has identified over 20 such areas, which they refer to as 'belonging communities'. These areas have much in common with the long-gone, but still cherished, Rural and Urban District Council areas: such as Glendale, Seaton Valley, Bedlingtonshire and Bellingham.

Why will these areas be important? They will be the localities within which communities will be encouraged to band together to engage with a range of 'outside' agencies to plan and deliver a wide range of public services. They will be the areas for which statistics will be gathered, to help decide how to deploy resources in future. They may also be areas over which local communities will co-operate to organise their own projects and services.

We in the Community Council support this initiative strongly: it is very similar to the community panel idea which we began to develop in 1995, to enable clusters of communities to gain access to European funding, and to deploy small grants schemes to

support community projects. However, we are well aware of the need to get the boundaries report: to respect local sensitivities, identities, affiliations, and traditions and to understand local rivalries as well.

For this reason, we are encouraging local communities throughout Northumberland to consider the proposals and to make their views known, before 7 April 2006, to:

Mrs Shona Johnstone, Infonet, Northumberland County Council, County Hall, Morpeth, NE61 2EF. email: sjohnstone@northumberland.gov.uk Tel: 01670 533903.

In particular:

- Do you feel that the areas are at about the right level for effective planning and monitoring of services, and for communities to work together?
- Are the suggested boundaries right, or how should they be adjusted?

Belonging Boundaries - Northumberland

□ Belonging Boundaries
● Towns
○ Roads



'Belonging communities' are one of 4 tiers in this National Communities scheme:

- Neighbourhoods
- Belonging communities
- Characteristic communities
- Associative communities

Fuller details can be viewed on the www.northumberland-laa.org.uk website.

The draft maps can be viewed on the www.northumberlandinfonet.org.uk website.

MASSIVE CHANGES IN 2006?

IF THE WIDELY-SPREAD RUMOURS are to be believed, Northumberland is facing a massive reorganisation of local government, which could begin later this year. Ever since the early 1990's, successive governments have raised doubts about the continuation of the two tiers of principal local authorities (counties and districts) in the 'shire' areas of England. Immediately after the November 2004 regional referendum, the Deputy Prime Minister made it quite clear that it remained the Government's policy to replace the 2 principal authority tiers with new unitary authorities: a transformation which had already taken place in Scotland, Wales, London, Metropolitan England and a number of other large cities.

Minister David Milliband has now announced a series of consultation meetings around the country to test the water, in advance of the publication of a White Paper in June, 2006. If reorganisation goes ahead, it will be a different approach from previous reviews across the country. The timescale will be shorter. The preferred 'map' will be proposed by the government. The new unitary authorities are likely to be larger than many which have been contemplated in the past.

If so, we must prepare ourselves for rapid change. We in the voluntary and community sector will wish to see continuity of service-provision and of effective working relationships with key staff, during the upheaval. It also seems likely that many voluntary organisations would wish to alter their boundaries, to fit in with the changed boundaries of local government. There might also be a new demand to create parish and town councils in towns such as Blyth and Ashington, which lost their local councils in the 1974 reorganisation.

Of course, this momentum may come to nothing, as was the case in 1994 and 2004, however, there seems to be a stronger resolve this time. The Government's initiative 'Local: Vision' is a significant commitment to a model of local government based on neighbourhoods, supported by much larger strategic bodies. In addition, the Government's reforming zeal has already taken hold of the NHS, Learning and Skills Council, Police forces and Business Link organisations: all of which are facing imminent amalgamation into larger units.

This time, they seem intent on carrying it through.

Full Steam Ahead for CCN

FOLLOWING A PAINFUL FEW MONTHS at the end of 2005, CCN has embraced 2006 with a new resolve and confidence to ensure that Northumberland's communities and voluntary organisations are well served for the future. The unexpected loss of European Objective 2 funding in September, brought about the closure of four offices, the loss of key staff, and a sense of indignation among many rural communities with close ties to CCN.

Now, following a period of consultations with a range of community representatives, local authorities and other agencies, we have re-focused our work, reorganised our internal structure, adjusted our budgets, and developed a new business plan for the years ahead. We will, of course, continue to support local community initiatives by giving advice, training and encouragement, although our capacity for giving intensive or prolonged support is much reduced. In addition, we will step up our support for networks of community groups and voluntary organisations, and forge further links between the voluntary and statutory sectors. This will involve several different types of network: community networks, linked to the Northumberland Natural Communities initiative; area wide networks of voluntary services; and the continually-evolving Northumberland-wide Voluntary and Community Sector Consortium.

Also, with support from DEFRA's new Social and Community Programme, we

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are planning some additional support for parish councils and for community buildings. This will include new training programmes, new ICT and e-government opportunities, renewed support for parish plans/community appraisals and other initiatives.

Support for local voluntary or community groups is now available as follows:

Local initiatives:

Berwick area:

Els Nicol, Community Development Officer, Berwick Voluntary Centre, 5 Tweed Street, Berwick upon Tweed, TD15 1NG.

Tel. 01289 304141

Alnwick area:

Julia Sharpley, Community Development Officer, The Centre, 27 Fenkle Street, Alnwick, NE66 1HW

Tel. 01665 605540

Castle Morpeth area:

Ken Walters Community Development Officer, Tower Buildings, 9 Oldgate, Morpeth, NE61 1PY

Tel. 01670 517178

Tynedale area:

Jane Hart, Community Development Officer, Hexham Community Centre, Gilesgate, Hexham, NE46 3NH

Tel. 01434 607871

County-wide specialist support on parish councils, community buildings, legal structures etc, is provided from our Morpeth Office by David Francis and Alan Hedley.

For local initiatives in the South-East of the county, help is available through: Blyth Valley CVS, 22 Beaconsfield Street, Blyth, NE24 2DP Tel. 01670 353623 and

Wansbeck CVS, 107-109 Station Road, Ashington, NE63 8RS Tel. 01670 858688

LOTTERY FUNDING FOR VILLAGE HALLS

IN OUR LAST ISSUE we gave some details of the Big Lottery Fund's Community Buildings programme.

Further information on the process is that it is likely to be a 2 stage application. The first stage will be the completion of an outline proposal form. On assessment of that proposal form applicants will be advised whether it is feasible for them to continue with their application. This is a process which is being increasingly adopted by larger funders. Where as the "go ahead" given to groups to progress to stage 2 does not guarantee that they will be successful, the process does prevent groups with little chance of success from spending time completing the full application form.

In our last issue we abbreviated our references to the Big Lottery Fund as BLF, which was common practice. The Fund is now using the abbreviation BIG and we shall use this in future articles when referring to the Big Lottery Fund.

BIG's Community Buildings programme will be operative from 1 June 2006. To assist village hall committees to understand the basics of the programme CCN are organising 3 information events around the county in June 2006. The events will be led by staff from BIG. Planned dates are Tuesday 6 June (in the north), Thursday 15 June (in the west) and Wednesday 21 June (central). More information will be sent to village halls prior to the events, but in the meantime make a note in your diary if you want to know more about this programme.

NORTHERN ROCK FOUNDATION

Timetable for grant applications in 2006 - January 2006

NRF ARE CURRENTLY REVIEWING their grant programmes and priorities. They plan to announce new or revised programmes in September 2006, and to make their first grants under these programmes in January 2007.

Their existing grant programmes - Prevention, Money and Jobs, Basics, Better Sector, Exploration, Aspiration and Capital - will run for the whole of 2006. They will, however, close to new applications under these programmes from the summer, so that they can carry out all the assessments by the end of the year.

They expect the timetable for applications to be as follows.

Monday 31 July 2006

Last date for new applications under the existing programmes.

Mid-September 2006

Announcement of new programmes, with publicity and promotional events continuing through the autumn.

December 2006

Assessments begin under new programmes.

Late-December 2006

Announcement of last grants under old programmes.

January 2007

Announcement of first small grants (under £15,000) under new programmes.

March 2007

Announcement of first large grants (over £15,000) under new programmes.

Please note that they will not assess any new applications received after 31 July 2006 that are made under their existing programmes. Applicants will be able to submit their proposals under the new programmes from the launch date onwards, but NRF won't begin assessing them until December, as they will be concentrating on the outstanding applications made under their existing programmes.

They will make every effort to stick to these dates, but it's possible they might have to make some changes. If so they will inform applicants and advise organisations like CVS.

They expect to spend their budget in 2006 roughly as follows.

Prevention	£5,500,000
Money and Jobs	£3,500,000
Basics	£3,500,000
Exploration	£ 700,000
Better Sector	£2,200,000
Aspiration	£3,000,000
Capital scheme	£3,000,000
Total	£21,400,000

This is an increase of over £1 million on their main programmes in 2005.

For more information about the Foundation visit www.nr-foundation.org.uk or contact 0191 284 8412.

Northumberland Rural Voices Network

RURAL VOICES, a free on-line network launched in May last year, is an interactive website that promotes communication and information sharing amongst people in rural Northumberland, with interests in rural development. Rural Voices is an inclusive network - anyone is welcome to visit, join, suggest content for and contribute to discussion-on through the website.

On-line discussion topics can be suggested and discussion threads under those topics can be created by Rural Voices Members. The website offers News, Events, Jobs, and Library sections, all of which can be added to by visitors of the network. Connections to other resources are provided through the Useful Links section, and the Organisations and Members Directories - again all of which you can add to.

Membership to Rural Voices is free, and should you choose to create a Member Profile and express your interests, the My News section will then display only news relating to those interests.

Visit www.ruralvoices.org.uk to see how the network could be of use to you, and for your free membership. If you have any enquiries or would like to discuss your use of Rural Voices, please contact Amy Rust by e-mail: Amy@ruralvoices.org.uk or telephone: (01670) 533900. Further contact details are on the website.

SIXTYEIGHTYTHIRTY SUPPORTING WOMEN IN TYNE DALE

SIXTYEIGHTYTHIRTY is a charity offering practical and emotional support to women in Tynedale who have experienced domestic abuse. Initial funding for the service was provided by the Henry Smith Charity through the Community Foundation and additional support has been provided by the Lloyds TSB Foundation, the Northumberland Local Network Fund, the Northumbrian Water Pipeline Fund, the Christopher Rowbotham Charitable Trust, Milecastle Housing Community Support Fund, Hexham Abbey and several Parish Councils.

Georgie Cruddas, Co-ordinator of SixtyEightyThirty says, "We are also grateful to Tynedale Council for their ongoing support and are very happy to announce that we have received a grant of £150,000 over three years from the Northern Rock Foundation. This, together with a gift of £20,000 from the committee of Oakdale House in Sheffield which has recently closed, will allow the employment of two part-time project workers".

Additional staff means that the service provided by SixtyEightyThirty can be expanded to ensure that women who find it difficult to access help can be supported. Thanks to funding from Government Northeast, a pilot project to help children living in families where there is domestic abuse is to be run in Tynedale.

Women can access the support of SixtyEightyThirty by contacting them direct on 01434 608030 or by asking someone else to ring on their behalf. The office is in the Community Centre in Hexham and all work is completely confidential.

THE NORTHUMBERLAND GROUP FUND

THE NORTHUMBERLAND GROUP FUND aims to enhance the educational and employment opportunities of young people in Northumberland.

Following a major donation from the Northumberland Group (formerly Northumberland TEC) of over £1m, the Fund is awarding a few major grants for capital or revenue projects of up to £100,000

- Priority given to schemes which help young people gain employment
- Projects which draw in additional funds will be welcomed
- Projects should demonstrate how they will continue when the period ends

The Fund will also make a number of smaller grants of up to £25,000 for project expenses, equipment or capital items. The Fund intends to award grants throughout the county with special consideration for disadvantaged areas.

All applications must be for charitable purposes and projects which should be funded from statutory sources - such as school buildings - will not be considered.

About half of the £1m donation will be invested to provide income for grants to be awarded on an annual basis. There will also be bursaries available for apprenticeships and details will be announced later.

The Fund is managed by the Community Foundation and applications must be received by 30th March for decision by the end of June, with the aim of enabling revenue projects to start in the 2006 academic year. Application forms are available from the Community Foundation or can be downloaded from the website, www.communityfoundation.org.uk

Lisa Cappleman will be willing to provide further advice to potential applicants, telephone 0191 222 0945

PARISH PLANS IN NORTHUMBERLAND

THE COMMUNITY COUNCIL of Northumberland are arranging a training and information event at Stannington Village Hall on 20 March 2006, aimed at celebrating the achievements of local Parish Plans in Northumberland, sharing good practice and making links between communities and local authorities. The aim is to introduce even more communities to the benefits of a Parish Plan. This is an opportunity to share good practice with those communities that have already completed a Parish Plan and get advice on how to start.

The event will cover:

The benefits of doing a Parish Plan, examples of good practice, influencing new planning development, integrating decision-makers, funding opportunities, turning proposals into projects.

More details and a booking form have been sent to parish council clerks. Should you require an application pack please contact CCN's office at Morpeth on 01670 517178 or email info@ccn.org.uk

A SPRING DATE FOR YOUR DIARY

FELTON VILLAGE HALL is the venue for CCN's Spring General Meeting on Wednesday afternoon 3 May. The business part of the meeting will commence at 2.30pm with tea and biscuits available from 2.00pm. More detail will follow in the next issue but in the meantime mark the date in your diary.

Don't Get Evicted Get Advice

PEOPLE LIVING IN NORTHUMBERLAND who are facing eviction from their home have been handed a lifeline thanks to a new initiative funded by the Legal Services Commission. Working in partnership with HM Courts Service and local advice providers, the Legal Services Commission has set up a new Housing Possession scheme under the heading "Don't Get Evicted, Get Advice".

Under the scheme, homeowners or tenants who are facing eviction and attend the court will be able to get free advice and representation from housing experts at Row & Scott, Solicitors, or DAWN Advice Ltd. The scheme covers rent and mortgage possession hearings held at both Morpeth and Berwick County Courts and the possession hearings held at Alnwick.

Liz Chadwick, Chief Executive of DAWN Advice Ltd, a specialist national advice agency based in Amble, said, "People should always seek advice if they have a problem paying the rent or mortgage but for those people who have not already done so, this scheme offers real hope and a much better chance of keeping their home. It is vital that people are made aware of the scheme and actually attend the court."

It is hoped that organisations and individuals who know of, or work with people facing eviction, will make them aware of this scheme and encourage them to attend the court hearing. Facing eviction and attending a court hearing can be a frightening experience but people can now come to court safe in the knowledge that help is at hand.

People should try to arrive at the court at least 45 minutes before the time of their hearing, give their name to the Court Usher and ask to see the Court Duty Housing Adviser. It is helpful if people take as many details and documents as possible, relating to their case, to the court but should not worry if they don't have all the information to hand - the adviser will still talk to them and do their best to help.

After the hearing the adviser writes to the individual and explains what has happened, including details of what the Court decided or ordered and outlining any need for further advice. If further advice is needed or other problems are identified the adviser may be able to help as a part of their other work, or may refer the client to another Solicitor or advice agency as appropriate.

Nicola Thackray, Regional Director of the Legal Services Commission, said: "Facing homelessness can have a devastating effect on people and their families. Our funding is helping save people's homes and changing lives for the better."

The Legal Services Commission is responsible for the legal aid scheme in England and Wales and for ensuring that people get the information, advice and legal help they need to deal with a wide range of everyday problems. The Commission is funding 9 Court Duty Housing Schemes worth over £250,000 to deliver housing possession schemes in every County Court in the North East. The schemes have the potential to help more than a thousand people in Northumberland and thousands more across the North East.

In Northumberland the local Community Legal Service Partnership provides a forum for organisations such as CABx, Welfare Rights Units and solicitors firms to identify gaps in service and to develop new schemes to meet these needs. To find out more about local advice services or get help and information on a problem you can either visit www.clsdirect.org.uk or ring CLS Direct on 0845 345 4 345.

For more information on the Court Duty Housing Scheme or any matter referred to above please contact Paul Hillier, Regional Planning and Partnership Consultant, on 0191 2445800 or email paul.hillier@legalservices.gov.uk

NORTH NORTHUMBERLAND CARERLINK PROJECT

THE AIM OF CARERLINK is to involve carers directly in providing support services to other carers by utilizing and developing the empathic skills of current and/or former carers. In order to ensure accessibility for as many carers as possible and combat the issues of rural transport and isolation difficulties, the initial core service of the project is a confidential telephone linking system managed by two P/T co-ordinators who are responsible for establishing and maintaining a database of carers and monitoring outcomes. In addition, carer volunteers are recruited as listeners and offered personal support and training to develop their skills and raise their self esteem.

A crucial element of the project is in publicising the support service and this involves liaison with any other professional organisation or voluntary group who may have contact with carers either formally or informally eg. Social services, health professionals, Age Concern workers, WI groups etc. If you would like us to come and talk to you please give the co-ordinators a call (contact details below).

The potential beneficiaries of CarerLink are all the informal carers residing in the North Northumberland region whether they are registered carers or not. One of the biggest problems in getting through to people is getting them to recognise in the first place that they are carers.

The intended outcomes of CarerLink are :

- that more carers are confident at identifying their own needs and seeking support through the services offered
- that carers will be registered on a confidential database and receive regular communications about what is available to support them within the locality
- that carers receiving telephone support will report that they feel less isolated by their circumstances and able to express their needs and feelings more adequately as a result of the linking service
- that carers are enabled to access support from other carers irrespective of whether they live within a town or a rural location
- that the support services offered will be organized to encompass both distance and face to face opportunities for carers
- that carers will be enabled to consider and express their ongoing needs which will be reflected by CarerLink as a voice for carers through contributing to the Northumberland County Strategy
- that CarerLink will continue to evolve, offering a range of services and mechanisms by which to support carers, and that these services will be an ongoing response to needs expressed directly by carers with whom the project comes into contact.

If you are a carer and would like to talk in confidence to someone who understands, or would like to be involved in the project as a volunteer, or would simply like further information, contact Jean or Kate, project co-ordinators on 01668 219951. They would love to hear from you.

(CarerLink is a project of the Community Council of Northumberland)

HELP FOR VULNERABLE HOMEOWNERS TO IMPROVE THEIR HOMES

VULNERABLE PEOPLE in Northumberland will be able to take advantage of a new scheme set up to help them improve their homes.

Northumberland Home Improvement Agency will help elderly, disabled and vulnerable homeowners, and those who rent from private landlords to gain advice and assistance in undertaking essential property repairs, improvements or disabled adaptations.

Agency staff will visit people in their own homes, tailoring advice and assistance to suit their needs and helping them through the stress of organising home repairs or adaptations.

Help and support from home improvement agencies is long established and valued throughout most of England but until recently was not available to people living in Northumberland.

Increasingly it is being recognised that poor housing and poor health are linked and that people are often unable to remedy some of the housing problems they face without help.

If you feel that the agency can be of assistance to you, an elderly relative or friend, then please contact the agency administrator, Susan Poole on 01670 840469

FROM THESE PAGES IN...

READERS MAY REMEMBER the series we ran from our February 2000 issue through to our October 2003 issue in which we covered snippets of news from the relative issues 5, 10, 15 and 20 years previous.

This trip down memory lane feature was discontinued in the December 2003 issue as we were beginning to repeat some of the issues. However the February issue from 20 years ago contains an article which is worth repeating in its entirety to acknowledge the changes that have occurred during twenty years of service from CCN's Director.

FEBRUARY 1986 NEW BLOOD

The Community Council's new Director (the name will change at the same time) is to be Dr David Francis. David is currently Assistant Director with Hereford and Worcester Rural Community Council. This means he will bring to Northumberland a great deal of experience of advising parish councils and village halls committees and of other types of community development with voluntary organisations.



TOMORROW'S CLIMATE - Today's Challenge

DO YOU KNOW of any young person aged 10-18 who could submit a report on climate changes in the UK? The report could be a newspaper article, a web news-page, video, film, or a recording. The winners will be invited to meet Government Ministers then visit Switzerland to see glacial retreat in action, before returning to pass on the climate change message to their peers.

The closing date for entries is 5.30pm on 31 March 2006 and the 30 semi-finalists will be notified by 30 April.

More details and nomination forms can be obtained from:
<http://www.n-ergise.net/page/index.cfm>

AWARDS FOR ALL

IT IS NOW CONFIRMED that from 1 April 2006 groups can apply for between £300 and £10,000 on any one application.

Groups can now receive a maximum of £10,000 in any 24 month period. This will be from the date they are notified of any award made.

As Chairman of his local village hall committee in Herefordshire he has been instrumental in initiating a local history project, a social club for elderly people and a youth club, so his knowledge comes from direct experience as well as office-based administration.

Before coming involved in the voluntary sector, David Francis worked in the Local Plans Section of a District Council in Lincolnshire. His PhD is in Rural Planning and he is a member of the RTPi. His ten years experience of rural affairs therefore cover a broad span from local government to first-hand knowledge.

In contrast to Alec Trotter, his predecessor, David Francis seems to relish the outdoor life and lists hill-walking, cycling and running amongst his interests - although mention of "brewing" does point to some relaxation!

With an Executive Committee which changes every year and a very small staff, the Community Council will naturally expect a new Director to put his stamp on the organisation. We all welcome David Francis to Northumberland ... and look forward to the next 30 years!

IN THE VILLAGE HALL KITCHEN

AFTER A RECENT kitchen inspection, an environmental health officer told Jackie Scrowther, Chair of Ovingham Reading Room, that the rules about having properly qualified people involved with food preparation would, in future, be vigorously enforced.

This means that whenever food is prepared for sale at any venue including fund raising events, at least one member of the team must have a Basic Food Hygiene Certificate. This is usually achieved by attending an eight hour course followed by an exam. The certificate is valid for three years and the holder may then supervise other kitchen helpers whenever food is prepared for sale to the public.

Some of the Basic Food Hygiene courses cost £70 per student. Linda Nicholls, the teacher in charge of Adult Education Courses in Prudhoe High School and Prudhoe Open Door, came to the rescue with a subsidised course which took place in Ovingham Reading Room. 24 students attended and happily paid the £25 fee for what turned out to be a very informative course led by Dave Holden of Queen Elizabeth High School.

Jackie said, "Dave did not merely teach us the basics in order to get us all through the exam; he addressed all the particular problems which can arise when preparing food on a field during a fete, cooking on a camp fire and other challenging situations".

Those who completed this course agreed that not only were they better informed but would now be able to legally continue their voluntary food preparation tasks.



THE COMMUNITY COUNCIL of Northumberland achieved the Investors in People status on 2 June 2005.

An awards ceremony was held at Kirkley Hall in late January where CCN and another 28 organisations received their plaques recognising their achievement.

The picture shows Judith Arthur, CCN's chairman at the date of achievement, and Alan Hedley, Assistant Director receiving the plaque from Mark Robertson, Managing Director of the Northumberland Cheese Company and a member of the Business Link Board.

CAN INDEPENDENTAGE HELP YOU?

ARE YOU OVER 65 and struggling to survive on a low income? Or over 40 and permanently unable to work due to illness or disability? IndependentAge, previously known as Rukba, helps older people to stay independent in their own homes. A small additional income of up to £19 per week is provided, together with the friendship of a local volunteer visitor.

Priority is given to those who have helped others, either in their working or private lives: e.g. nurses, carers, teachers, those who have done voluntary work or have perhaps given up their own pension rights in order to look after a sick or elderly relative.

To qualify for help, applicants must have income and savings within the limits set by IndependentAge. Applicants should be over 65, or over 40 and permanently unable to work due to illness, e.g. MS.

IndependentAge are helping around 250 people in the North East and would like to help more.

If you think that you, or someone you know, may be eligible for help, please contact Charlotte Loyd, tel. 01434 220544 or Alice Murphy on 020 7605 4245. All advice is given in total confidence.

CAN YOU CIC IT?

Neil Foster, Project Director of Rooted writes: Community Interest Companies, or 'CICs', are a new type of limited company initiated by Government this summer. It is a form of social enterprise designed specifically for businesses wishing to operate for the benefit of the community rather than for shareholders.


There are certain restrictions which the Government has put in the new legislation for CICs. A CIC cannot be formed to support political activities and a company that is a charity cannot be a CIC unless it gives up its charitable status. However, a charity may apply to register a CIC as a subsidiary company. Many organisations will have to decide whether their aims and objectives are best served as a charity or CIC, and local community development and enterprise support organisations should be able to give impartial advice.

The CIC Regulator is appointed by the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry and the post is currently filled by John Hanlon. His team will determine whether applicants pass a 'Community Interest Test' and will receive reports to confirm that they are operating in the spirit of CICs. The Government expects the Regulator to be a "light touch regulator" who will encourage the development of the CIC brand and provide guidance and assistance on matters relating to CICs.


The Government appears to be very committed to CICs and some charitable funders are showing willingness in supporting them. Although there is still a wide-ranging debate about their merits, it will give assurances to external partners that these social enterprises have an 'asset lock' in place. This ensures the assets and surpluses are retained within the CIC for community purposes, or transferred to another asset-locked organisation, such as another CIC or charity, should the business ever wind up.

Will CICs succeed? Many people accepted that previously there was not a tidy, easily recognised form or structure for social enterprise. CICs have the potential to become a broad and easily-recognisable structure of social enterprise and that is something we should welcome.

The CIC Regulator's office is part of Companies House and has its own website www.cicregulator.gov.uk/ which gives sample documents, contact details and some assistance with the application process. Other business support for social enterprises can be gained from Social Enterprise Northumberland on 01670 534 026 or www.enterpisenorthumberland.co.uk. 01670 534026



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WHAT WE DO

THE COMMUNITY COUNCIL OF 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

CCN is anxious to ensure that it effectively supports local communities and therefore operates a process of continuous evaluation. This requires feedback from our users. Any comments on services provided 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.

Northumberland Community News is published bi-monthly. 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 at Tower Buildings, 9 Oldgate, Morpeth, NE61 1PY or email items direct to alanhedley@ccn.org.uk.

Copy deadline for the next edition is Tuesday 21 March 2006.

For more information on the Community Council check out their website at www.ccn.org.uk

HOW TO CONTACT US

MAIN OFFICE

David Francis, (*Director*),
 Alan Hedley, (*Assistant Director*),
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