

Communities Committee

Item No.....

Report title:	Norfolk Association of Local Councils – Service Level Agreement
Date of meeting:	25 January 2017
Responsible Chief Officer:	Tom McCabe – Executive Director, Community and Environmental Services
Strategic impact Norfolk's c.545 town and parish or Local councils play an important democratic and service delivery role in communities across the county. Working alone, with each other and with voluntary and public agencies, Local councils can and are making a significant community impact. As such, they are an important player in the strategic leadership provided by the Council to achieve a Norfolk public service as expressed in Moving Norfolk Forward and the County Council Plan 2016-19. Local councils offer potential to be part of the solution in the Council's and our partner's preventative service approaches.	

Executive summary

The Council has a long-standing grant funding arrangement with the body representing most Local councils, the Norfolk Association of Local Councils (Norfolk ALC). The existing three year Service Level Agreement (SLA) will expire in March 2017 - the proposal is to replace this with a new three year agreement, supporting building local community capacity. The SLA would commence 1 April 2017 and end 31 March 2020 and would be reviewed annually.

Work has taken place with Norfolk ALC to shape a new three year SLA to deliver the following proposed outcomes:

1. Effective two-way communication between Norfolk County Council (NCC) and all Local councils
2. Increased participation between NCC and Local councils to develop greater strength in communities
3. Increased capacity for Norfolk's Local councils complementary to the Council's future delivery models.

Recommendations:

1. **Consider and agree the priorities and outline action plan for the three-year Norfolk ALC SLA (2017-20)**
2. **Convene a Member workshop to further develop the SLA/action plan with Norfolk ALC for joint working with local Councils and communities. Delegate agreement of the SLA to the Executive Director for Communities and Environmental Services in consultation with the Chairman of the Communities Committee.**

1. Proposal

Local councils are an important partner in local governance and accountability across Norfolk. At present, there are around 545 Norfolk Local councils, although the urban areas of Norwich, Great Yarmouth and some wards in King's Lynn, are not parished.

Modern Local councils are fully constituted delivery agents, governed by local people and able to discharge a range of functions to the communities they serve. The duties they exercise vary considerably from the management of local assets such as community rooms, playing fields and recreation facilities, public conveniences etc. to delivery of services for youth and older people. As elected bodies with precept raising powers, and often employing one or more paid staff, Local councils have considerable scope to be even greater delivery agents in Norfolk.

It should be noted that the 545 figure includes areas that have Parish Meetings, which are different to fully constituted Parish and Town Councils. Parish Meetings cannot raise a precept, are constituted only in a limited way and do not have to comply with the Local Council Code of Conduct. They are not subject to the same rules as Parish Councils, do not have the General Power of Competence (see section 1.1) and are unable to hold property.

The Council supports Local councils through an SLA with Norfolk Association of Local Councils. Norfolk ALC provide a membership service including information and guidance, training and engagement services to over 400 member councils, and a more general information service to non-members. For the County Council, the Norfolk ALC arrangements provide a useful way to engage with the wider body of Local councils. In the past, this has been used at times of budget consultation, when considering development of policy and as an important communication channel.

Responsibility for the management of the Norfolk ALC SLA rests with the Community and Environmental Services (CES) department as part of its community remit. The current SLA expires in March 2017 and CES have been working with the Norfolk ALC executive and board to consider options to support enhanced partnership arrangements, of which there are considerable opportunities.

1.1 Local councils' powers

Local councils have two sets of powers relevant to the Council's desire to work more closely with all delivery agents in Norfolk. The General Power of Competence granted through the 2011 Localism Act enables Local councils to take on much greater responsibility around service delivery should they choose to do so. This presents opportunities for greater devolvement of services from County to Local council level. In addition, Local council's ability to raise a precept for the Local council area offers considerable scope to support a broad range of delivery functions or work collaboratively with other partners should this be considered desirable.

1.2 Current arrangements between Norfolk County Council and Local councils

NCC currently work with or support Local councils in a number of ways ranging from the formal to the informal. Examples include:

- Parish partnerships - Each year Local councils are invited to submit bids for highway improvement schemes. For 2017/18 the fund is £300,000 with

Norfolk County Council funding 50% of the cost of successful bids. Local councils contribute the balance

- Highways rangers tops ups - This initiative allows highway maintenance works to be carried out that is important to the community but would be considered low priority on the Council's highway defect register. The scope of works could include shallow pothole repairs on minor roads and other activities such as verge repairs, grass strimming and sign cleaning
- Third party delegation agreements - Some Town & Parish Councils undertake highway verge grass cutting, public footpath cutting and sign cleaning on our behalf. We pay them a rate and they undertake the works each year
- Informal help offer to train volunteers – Highways provide gritting group training at Swaffham and Thetford. Some Local councils have purchased their own hand spinners to distribute the salt
- Highways information - A good number of Local councils are in close contact with Highways teams regarding a range of highways related issues.

1.3 Arrangements at other authorities

A number of other County Councils have developed specific arrangements for working with Local councils in recent years. Many of these are in response to the opportunities arising from the Localism Act of 2011 and in recognition of the General Powers of Competence Local councils have been able to exercise since then. This means for those Local councils that want to be more active agents of delivery, there are far fewer limits on the type of services they may provide to communities. This greater flexibility is obviously good for local people, and it places the exercise of duties and delivery of services which will directly impact on people living in an area, with people elected from that community.

1.4 A new relationship with Local councils – The role of Members and renewal of the Norfolk ALC Service Level Agreement (SLA)

The expiry of the current Norfolk ALC SLA is a good opportunity to review Norfolk ALC's work programme with NCC and align this to the strategic ambitions around a Norfolk public service as expressed in the Moving Norfolk Forward plan. A draft SLA is attached at Appendix 1. This has been developed with the Norfolk ALC Executive and Board.

In addition, the renewal of the Norfolk ALC SLA presents an opportunity to support Member's leadership role in the development of both sector's relationship with the Council and county councillors role as advocates between local communities and Council services. It is proposed that a Communities Committee workshop be convened to explore how Local council's and other bodies can be supported to work more closely together in the future and to understand how both can maximise their support of each other. This will inform the final SLA.

2. Financial Implications

The proposals in this paper can be met within the existing budget of £26,000 per year.

3. Background

County Council Plan 2016-19

<https://www.norfolk.gov.uk/what-we-do-and-how-we-work/policy-performance-and-partnerships/policies-and-strategies/corporate/county-council-plan>

Officer Contact

If you have any questions about matters contained or want to see copies of any assessments, eg equality impact assessment, please get in touch with:

Officer Name: David Collinson

Tel No: 01603 222253

Email address: david.collinson@norfolk.gov.uk



If you need this report in large print, audio, Braille, alternative format or in a different language please contact 0344 800 8020 or 0344 800 8011 (textphone) and we will do our best to help.

Appendix 1: DRAFT Norfolk ALC SLA action plan (detail agreed with Member working group)

Outcomes sought	Why this is needed	Draft actions led by Norfolk ALC	When (approx)
1. Effective two-way communication between NCC and all Local councils	Regular and effective communication between NCC and all Local councils is the basis of productive working relationships and partnerships going forward. Norfolk ALC will provide an important communication channel for information provision about Council activity within localities and for NCC to receive information about Local councils.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Local Council Database – Include all 550 Local councils in Norfolk ALC database - New website – Develop close integration of local online infrastructure: to support Locality information eg access to available support; self-access features – include social media - Media content – place content in existing media for Local councils eg NCC's Norfolk Matters 	-Q1 -Q3 -2 editions / year
2. Increased participation between NCC and Local councils to develop greater strength in communities	<p>NCC recognises the importance of Norfolk's existing community infrastructure, which is a great asset to the county. Through greater levels of engagement, partnership working and devolved service approaches, Local councils can support, make an active and even greater contribution to local service delivery.</p> <p>Increased collaboration between Local councils and NCC is important for the delivery of NCC's broader preventative approaches and to meet the strategic ambition in Moving Norfolk Forward for example, greater partnership collaboration, one public service, and making the best use of our resources.</p> <p>Norfolk ALC can support Local council's take up of opportunities to deliver locally for example Parish Partnerships, community travel schemes, Highways Ranger</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Events – Regular Norfolk ALC events to promote local opportunities eg to develop prospectus of NCC delivery opportunities for Local councils - Active relationships between Local councils and NCC increases eg through parish partnership adoption, Highways Rangers top ups, targeted use of volunteers - Third party delegation agreements – encourage greater take up of these supporting local leadership and delivery of community services 	-Qs1-4 -Qs1-4

	etc.		
3. Increased capacity for Norfolk's Local councils	<p>Local councils are a long established and important part of local democratic infrastructure with considerable delivery potential. Changes to General Power of Competence in the 2011 Localism Act present an opportunity for Local councils to play a more significant delivery role in their area.</p> <p>Many Local councils have already told NCC they would like to do more in their area – this fits with NCC's strategic approach around enabling communities to create greater capacity and resilience. The Council wishes to enter a dialogue into what can be done to assist and increase Local council's capacity to deliver.</p>	- Research - Provide evidence (including best practice) for current Local council activity for example: use of the Power of Competence, precept levels, Parish Partnerships, asset management to help inform future targeted support of Local councils.	-Q2
		- Sharing good practice - Increased number of councils self-promoting and sharing their work including locality approaches using feature on Norfolk ALC Website. Promoting best practice in financial management, creative thinking, accessing information and advice. Providing toolkits and resources, increasing confidence and competence to deliver amongst Local councils.	-Qs1-4
		- Access to funding – Regular promotion of funding opportunities to support delivery / development of assets.	-Qs1-4
		- Training – The number of councils taking part in Norfolk ALC promoted and delivered training to improve function.	-Qs1-4
		- Next generation thinking – promote initiatives amongst Local councils that: create healthy local democracy, strategic thinking, modern service delivery and fresh approaches to addressing community need.	-Qs1-4
		- Standards & Ambition – Promoting improved standards and delivery within councils through demonstrable measures such as the Local Council Award Scheme, Certificate in Local Council	-Qs1-4

		Administration and compliance with the Governance and Accountability Proper Practices.	
--	--	--	--

SLA length

Three years from April 2017-March 2020

SLA value

£26k per year (£78k over three years). Annual payments made at the commencement of each financial year.

Review and monitoring arrangements

Quarterly meetings

Purpose: To review delivery against the outcomes. Quarterly meetings between Norfolk ALC Chief Officer and CES Community team representatives, including the annual review report and the year ahead planning. The meetings are an opportunity to review and make changes, where necessary and through mutual agreement, to the actions that appear in the SLA.

Annual report:

Purpose: To report formally against the outcomes prior to commencement of next year's delivery and describe following years' focus. Reports due by 1 March 2018, 2019 and 2020.