

## Northants County Association of Local Councils (NCALC)

2017 AGM.

Moulton Community Centre.

Report on the proceedings by Cllr. A Garratt representing Dingley Parish Council.

130 councillors and clerks representing over eighty member councils gathered on Saturday 7th October 2017. The venue was the superb and impressive Moulton Community Centre.

In a changed format this year, the AGM opened with a BBC Question Time-style panel comprising the MP for Daventry Chris Heaton-Harris, the Chief Constable for Northamptonshire Simon Edens, the Chairman of the National Association of Local Councils (NALC) Sue Baxter, and the Deputy Leader of Northamptonshire County Council (NCC) Matt Golby.

Questions were submitted the week before by delegates and in true BBCQT fashion the panellists did not know what the questions were in advance. This report can be found on NCALC's website.

The first question was put by Kevin Nichols of Everdon Parish Council who asked "Does the panel know what happened to Localism?". It gave the panellists an opportunity to give their perspective on how local services are delivered and whether or not there are opportunities for parish and town councils to be part of the solution. The consensus appeared to be that some progress on Localism had been made but that much more needed to be done to drive the delivery of services down to the most local level possible.

The second question was from Stephen Hiscock of Hunsbury Meadows Parish Council: "With continuing reductions in the number and visibility of local police, are low crime areas now being ignored?", a reference to the perceived lack of [visible] policing outside the main towns in the county. The question sparked a good discussion that addressed the reality of reducing resources and increasing demands, particularly in new areas such as cyber-crime and online safety and child exploitation.

Sam Dobbs of Harlestone Parish Council asked the third and final substantive question: "With cuts in virtually all public services in the county, there is growing opportunity for parish councils to fill in the gaps. What services could be devolved to us and will finance follow function?". Every panellist said they could see opportunities for parish and town councils to be part of the solution, whether it be sponsoring a PCSO or taking over grass cutting. However, in answer to the second part of the question it was clear that it will be up to parish and town councils to fund such services from the precept or from raising income from other sources.

I found the business of NCALC to have been routine, uneventful and did not include anything worthy of reporting. There is a report and minutes on the NCALC site.

Notes made soon after the discussions. Council services will be "basic". Fly tipping. Street Maintenance. Housing Maintenance. Social Services. Care Homes. All basic. This will inevitably mean the balance of resources being prioritised to urban areas as they require proportionally more money to maintain a basic level.

The County Councillor urged councils to consider self-help as a 'Top-Up'. A analogy with the NHS. It offers the basic care but we can get better standard of medical care if we pay extra for Private Medical Insurance. If we want a prettier village we need to employ a maintenance person. This was also the Chief Constables answer to communities who want more visible policing sponsor our own Special or PSO. The Chief Constable said that the resources at his disposal have to be target at the most serious crime and that is increasingly urban based and to a degree internet driven. He has to balance the view that

citizens wish to see Bobbies on the beat against the reality that they are more effective off the beat. He also said that policing in rural areas is high on his agenda but that statistically we are quite crime free and will get a basic standard of policing with back-up specialist help when needed.

One question to the Chief Constable addressed the question of policing in rural communities. Why when 'local' bobbies are just getting to know their communities are they offered another job away. He said it was a problem of police pay scales that are imposed. For a good police officer to get on he has to move on and he would be reluctant to prevent that happening, as it improves the effectiveness of the force overall, but understands the frustration it causes in rural communities.

An overriding theme was the use the MP, Councillor and Chief Constable placed on Social Media and the positive role it plays. The Chief Constable was asked about the problems associated with the 101 system and he actually suggested that using Facebook maybe more effective.

The attempt to change the rules to allow PC's to alter the number of councillors per council, or per meeting, has been abandoned. This was a proposal from an earlier AGM as an attempt to prevent the frequent non-quorate situations at meetings.

The meeting heard from Angela Beardsmore (Braybrooke) that Braybrooke, Arthingworth, Great Oxendon and another parish have formed a "Traveller" committee to support each other and jointly tackle problems. Afterwards, I made our possible interest known and suggested they could invite us to join them. It would be up to the council to agree to join or not.

During a conversation with the CC privately we discussed cross border policing and he told me it was a particular hobby horse of his and that he commits personally to participating in these frequent events. His prediction is that there will be an East Midlands Police Force before long (Northants, Leics and probably Lincs).