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CLG announcement on financial payments

Local councils will soon be freed from the shackles of old-fashioned payment methods such as cheque payment. This should enable them to settle invoices more quickly. Details of how orders for payment can be authorised are awaited. This is part of the Coalition Government's drive to reduce red tape and drive efficiency.

The Minister for Housing and Local Government, Grant Shapps MP, will soon announce that local councils will have the power to abolish the out-dated payment methods they currently have to use. They will soon be able to use modern payment methods such as electronic transfers.

The National Association will provide more information in due course, after the formal announcement. Please see the Communities and Local Government website at <http://www.communities.gov.uk> from 9 October for more information.

Call for views on the Big Society

The Big Society has scarcely been out of the news since the Coalition Government formed in May. But it is not yet clear just how this ambitious policy will be realised on the ground.

Local Government Chronicle's Big Society Survey, supported by NALC, seeks for the first time to gather the views of the many local partners that will deliver the Big Society: local authorities, local (parish and town) councils, voluntary organisations, social enterprises, community groups, and community leaders.

It is important to hear the views of county associations and local councils, so please take a few moments to complete the survey to help us gather a complete picture of the opportunities and challenges ahead from the perspectives of all the major players. Please pass this survey on to your member councils, councillors and officers. The survey asks about your opinions so requires no prior preparation and should take no more than five minutes to complete. All responses will be treated in confidence and answers will be used only in aggregate.

<http://www.zoomerang.com/Survey/WEB22B6W5UK5Z8>

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Principal Authority newspapers face tough controls

A new Department for Communities and Local Government draft code updating existing guidance from 1988 specifies that council papers and their web-based editions should appear no more than quarterly and must only include material directly related to the business, services or amenities of the authority. It says that council publicity should be determined by seven principles, namely that that it is 'lawful, cost-effective, objective, even-handed, appropriate, to have regard to equality and diversity and be issued with care during periods of heightened sensitivity.'

The code also asks councils to check 'whether it is appropriate' to seek advice from 'economic analysts, public relations experts or other sources of expert advice before embarking on a publicity campaign involving very large expenditure.' It also says councils should not spend money on lobbyists 'designed to influence public officials, MPs, political parties or the Government' or take stands at party conferences.

Below is information that has been received from NALC.



Code of Practice on Local Authority Publicity

The Coalition Agreement contains the commitment that the Government 'will impose tougher rules to stop unfair competition by local authority newspapers'. The Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government is also concerned at the use of lobbyists by local authorities.

Accordingly, the Government is now consulting on a new Code of Recommended Practice on Local Authority Publicity.

The current Code of Recommended Practice on Local Authority Publicity is contained in two separate circulars, the original one from 1988 (Department of the Environment: Circular 20/88) being revised in 2001 (Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions: Circular 06/2001) to update the rules for county councils, district councils and London borough councils in England.

The proposed new Code is a significant restructuring of the existing Codes, which are to be replaced. The guidance is now grouped into seven principles that require local authority publicity to be lawful, cost effective, objective, even-handed, appropriate, to have regard to equality and diversity, and be issued with care during periods of heightened sensitivity.

The proposed Code is also a single instrument rather than two circulars each addressing different tiers of local government. **The existing and the proposed new Code apply to all local authorities defined by Section 6 of the Local Government Act 1986, including local (parish and town) councils.**

The Government wants to encourage good, effective local communication between local authorities and their residents. It wants to see proper decisions made on publicity, by local authorities. The Government is therefore proposing a stronger, updated Code of Recommended Practice on Local Authority Publicity. The intended new Code would ensure the proper use of public funds for publicity, but would also provide guidance on content, dissemination and timing.

The new Code would be a single entity, containing specific guidance on the frequency, content and appearance of local authority newspapers and magazines. The provision on the use of lobbyists appears as a consideration relating to authorities' use of them for publicity purposes – in the context of authorities' possible use of taxpayers' money to lobby and influence on political decisions.

A copy of the consultation, which is 12 pages long, can be found at:

<http://www.communities.gov.uk/documents/localgovernment/pdf/1727384.pdf>

Comments on the below areas are requested:

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- Do the seven principles of local authority publicity as laid down in the Code encompass the full scope of the guidance required by local authorities?
- Do you believe that the proposed revised Code will impose sufficiently tough rules to stop unfair competition by local authority newspapers?
- Does the proposed Code enable local authorities to provide their communities with the information local people need at any time?
- Is the proposed Code sufficiently clear to ensure that any inappropriate use of lobbyists, or stalls at party conferences, is clearly ruled out?

The consultation runs for 12 weeks and closes on 10 November 2010.

County associations and member local councils are encouraged to respond to this consultation, including specific views on the wording of the proposed new Code. In order to help shape and inform our own submission, we would welcome your responses by Wednesday 27 October to chris.borg@nalc.gov.uk

Digital TV Switchover



Councils may find the following information of some use and could be included in your local newsletters. The timescales for the switchover from analogue to digital TV transmission is shown below.

Transmitter group	Area served	Stage one (BBC Two analogue off)	Stage two (all analogue channels off)
Belmont	Lincolnshire, Humberside and East Yorkshire	3 August 2011	17 August 2011
Oliver's Mount	the Scarborough area	3 August 2011	17 August 2011
Chesterfield	the Chesterfield area	10 August 2011	24 August 2011
Sheffield	the Sheffield area	10 August 2011	24 August 2011
Emley Moor	West Yorkshire and South Yorkshire	7 September 2011	21 September 2011

Switchover will see analogue TV channels switched off permanently in two stages and Freeview digital services boosted to reach virtually all households in the Yorkshire TV region. Thousands of homes, previously in digital blackspots, will be able to receive Freeview channels from relay transmitters for the first time boosting their choice of channels from four to around 15.



Look out for forthcoming additions to the ERNLLCA website more legal information and national news.

Council Finances

Principal Authorities must fundamentally re-think their finances' by merging services with neighbouring authorities – and forcing through changes to executive salaries - as they seek to slash costs, Communities Secretary Eric Pickles has told the Conservative Party conference.

Addressing delegates on the opening day of the Conservatives' annual conference in Birmingham on 3 October, Mr Pickles said 'there has never been a better time to be involved in Local Government'.

But amid concerns that Central Government grant to local authorities will shortly be slashed by 25% through Chancellor George Osborne's spending review, Mr Pickles added he was 'under absolutely no illusions about the difficult challenges' facing councils.

To complement forthcoming new freedoms for councils, such as the general power of competence, he urged a financial 'revolution' that would reconfigure service delivery and support.

Part of this, he said, should be enforced cuts to the chief executive salaries causing concern within Whitehall. He urged executives on £150,000 to take a 5% pay cut, and those on over £200,000 to take a 10% cut.

'Councils should share services, work across boundaries to drive down costs and protect front line services,' he added. 'Is it really necessary for councils to have separate education or planning departments or, heaven forbid, separate press offices?'

'Take Hammersmith & Fulham [LBC] with Westminster [LBC]. They will save the taxpayer £100 million by merging services, such as education. And that's just the start... the revolution is spreading. Christchurch and East Dorset councils are among the growing numbers that now share a chief executive. This is the future of local government.'

Mr Pickles also provided a little more information on his plan for place-based budgeting, which he has already revealed will form part of the post-spending review climate and will facilitate early intervention programmes - involving a range of local public bodies and designed to tackle deprivation, crime and poor health and education outcomes.

'We'll allow councils to pool the budgets across the public sector - social services, care, housing and health improvement, and reward councils for delivering results and preventing social breakdown,' he said.

As revealed by LocalGov.co.uk's sister title, The MJ, earlier this summer, Mr Pickles confirmed he also intends to create a new generation of powerful 'executive mayors' who could combine the roles of local leaders and chief executives to lead local public service improvements.

District Committees Meetings

The schedule for the Autumn meetings is:-

- | | | | |
|-------------------------|---|-------------------|----------------------------|
| East Riding North East | - | To be re-arranged | |
| East Riding Holderness | - | 19 October 2010 | - Council Chamber, Hornsea |
| North Lincolnshire | - | Cancelled | |
| North East Lincolnshire | - | 4 November 2010 | - Town Hall, Grimsby |



Executive Committee

The Committee will next meet on Saturday, 20th November 2010 and will set the membership fees for 2011/12 at that meeting. Information about this will be forwarded to councils as quickly as possible.

ERNLLCA Training Programme

The Role of the Councillor & Meeting Procedure

Date	Time	Venue	Choice
Wednesday 27 October 2010	7.00pm	Leven Recreation Hall, East Street, Leven, HU17 5NG	A
Thursday 28 October 2010	7.00pm	Elsham VH, Chapel Lane, Elsham, DN20 0RN	B
Thursday 4 November 2010	7.00pm	Seaton Ross Village Hall, Church Lane, Seaton Ross	C
Thursday 11 November 2010	7.00pm	Grimsby Town Hall	D

Being A Good Employer

Date	Time	Venue	Choice
Tuesday 23 November 2010	7.00pm	Elsham Village Hall, Chapel Lane, Elsham, DN20 0RN	A
Wednesday 24 November 2010	7.00pm	Leven Recreation Hall, East Street, Leven, HU17 5NG	B
Thursday 25 November 2010	7.00pm	Seaton Ross Village Hall, Church Lane, Seaton Ross	C
Thursday 2 December 2010	7.00pm	Grimsby Town Hall	D

Planning and Localism – Delivering Community Aspirations

6 November, Sheffield Hallam University

This Royal Town Planning Institute (RTPI) conference will look at the localism and planning agenda.

Speakers invited to speak include:-

- Planning minister, Bob Neil MP
- Chairman of the Local Government Association, Baroness Margaret Eaton
- Chair of the parliamentary CLG committee, Clive Betts MP

Topics will include:-

- Improving the planning experience
- Delivering for local communities
- Planning and climate change

To book email: pipa@rtpi.org.uk or phone: 01789 763006 or visit: www.rtpi.org.uk then view the 'Events Calendar'.

Public Sector Pensions

Former Labour minister John Hutton published the interim findings of his coalition-commissioned review of public sector pensions on 7 October, and suggested that workers could contribute more in order to offset the rising cost, and longevity, of provision. Mr Hutton is reviewing public pensions covering millions of staff in local government, the NHS, civil service, teaching and other roles. It follows concern from Chancellor George Osborne that public pension costs have soared by 32% in ten years. Mr Hutton said the main factor behind the soaring cost to taxpayers of public pensions was, as expected, the fact that people were living longer in retirement, so pension funds must pay them for longer.

But he also described the continued payment of final salary-linked pensions across the public sphere as 'fundamentally unfair' on lower paid staff. It has been suggested that public schemes could be forced to switch payouts to payments linked to an employee's average career salary, and Mr Hutton today said he would explore that option in greater detail when he publishes his final report in 2011.

In submissions to Mr Hutton's review team, the three main local government trade unions – Unison, GMB and Unite – all suggested they may be prepared to accept a switch to career average-linked pension payments, provided the total cost of the package involved did not fall.

The unions, and other local government bodies, have lobbied hard for the LGPS to be treated slightly separately within Mr Hutton's review, because unlike most public sector pension schemes, it is a funded plan – meaning it holds a cash pot of assets to make payments. The Treasury funds other schemes, such as the civil service and NHS plans, on an annual basis. To offset increased life expectancy, Mr Hutton said he would also consider a hike in the normal retirement age for public staff beyond the current norm of 65. Coalition ministers have already floated plans to expedite a change in the state pension age to 67 to ease costs, and public schemes could be brought into line with such a change. However, Mr Hutton defended public pensions from private sector accusations that they are unsustainable. He said average payments were a 'modest' £7,800 annually, with many staff receiving less – and praised the public sector's higher pension scheme membership rate when compared to private provision.

'I have rejected a race to the bottom,' Mr Hutton said. Joanne Segars, head of the National Association of Pension Funds, said Mr Hutton's report 'dispels some of the myths about [public] pensions but is realistic about the need to reshape them'.

The report is available at www.hm-treasury.gov.uk



Councillors and Social Media

The issue of how councillors can engage with electors electronically is now a matter of national debate. Events explaining how councillors can make use of e-technology will be discussed at a series of seminars being run across the North of England. We have been advised that one of the venues will be Scunthorpe on Friday, 12th November 2010. We do not have any further details at this point in time but we will issue information as it becomes available.