

**The Alliance
Minutes of the Executive Committee Meeting
30 January 2009
Wansbeck DC**

Agenda item 2

A civic welcome was given by the Civic Head of Wansbeck District Council, Cllr Brian Richmond.

Cllr Wormstrup introduced a new representative from Copeland, Cllr Bowman and Dave Hewet, Regional Secretary for Scotland, introduced the new support officer for Scotland, Anne Houston.

1. Attendance and apologies

Attendance

Cllr J. Devon	National Chair
S. Fothergill	National Secretariat
J. Dixon	National Secretariat
P. O'Mara	National Secretariat
D. Parry	National Secretariat
Cllr H. Wormstrup	Copeland
Cllr J. Bowman	Copeland
Cllr K. Jackson	Staffordshire Moorlands
Cllr E. Boden	Staffordshire CC
Cllr P. Ansell	Cannock Chase
Cllr S. Manion	Dover
Cllr K. Knight	Doncaster
Cllr W. Mordue	Doncaster
P. Greatorex	Observer
B. Cowley	Knowsley
Cllr J. Greer	Knowsley
Cllr K. Cunliffe	Wigan
Cllr L. McGuire	St Helens
Cllr T. O'Neill	Warrington
Cllr S. Wright	Rotherham
Cllr G. Whelbourn	Rotherham
T. O'Connell	Rotherham
J. Thomas	Coalfields Regeneration Trust
Cllr R. McGill	Clackmannanshire
Cllr G. Phelps	Wakefield
Cllr K. Parry	Wansbeck
Cllr A. Thomas	Neath Port Talbot
Cllr r. Wellington	Torfaen
Cllr A. Haynes	Nottinghamshire CC
T. Rawsterne	Nottinghamshire CC
Cllr W. Eckhardt	North Lincolnshire
A. McKay	Fife
D. Hewet	East Ayrshire
Cllr J. Kelly	East Ayrshire
A Houston	Alliance Scotland

Cllr E. Watts
D. Crawford
Cllr E. Malcolm
Cllr A. Napier
Cllr J. Maitland
M. Kipling
Cllr E. Blake

Bolsover
South Tyneside
South Tyneside
Easington
Easington
Easington
Newcastle-u-Lyme

Apologies

Cllr P. Kendall
B Hill
Cllr T. Wykes
H. Knowles
Cllr C. Hibberd
Cllr E. Rowbotham
Cllr S. Carol
Cllr J. King
D. Ivill

Allerdale
Dover
North Warwickshire
Furness Enterprise
Kent CC
Kent CC
Nottinghamshire CC
Salford
Salford

2. Minutes of the National General Meeting of 5 December 2008

2.1. Cllr O'Neill noted that he had not been recorded as attending the meeting. It was agreed to correct this. The minutes were then agreed as a correct record and there were no matters arising.

3. Minutes of the Policy Advisory Group meeting of 14 January 2009

3.1. The minutes were agreed as a correct record.

3.2. Steve Fothergill, Alliance Director, highlighted the good attendance at the meeting and indicated that the suggestions from the meeting were incorporated in the relevant agenda items.

4. Welfare reform

4.1. A decision was taken at the beginning of 2008 for the Alliance to engage with the issue of incapacity benefit and worklessness. However, particularly in the context of the recession, the White Paper on welfare reform has serious drawbacks. The Policy Advisory Group recommended that the Alliance should remain engaged on this issue and if necessary challenge the government and try to steer it away from the current hard line.

4.2. It emerged from a meeting in the House of Commons, which two members of the Secretariat attended, that an all out back bench rebellion was unlikely.

4.3. In a wide-ranging discussion representatives expressed their concerns that the government was pressing ahead with these reforms despite the dramatic economic downturn and the prospects of much higher unemployment. It was agreed that the Secretariat should explore the options for Alliance intervention and possibly produce a briefing for MPs to try to influence matters in Westminster.

5. Worklessness review

5.1. An interim report of the Tackling Worklessness Review Team had been published. The Secretariat had been in regular contact with the Review Team. An event to disseminate the interim findings and provide an opportunity for Alliance member input was planned in Barnsley on 10 February. Cllr Steve Houghton, Chair of the team, is to be the keynote speaker. Alliance representatives were encouraged to attend.

5.2. It was also reported that the Secretary of State at DWP, James Purnell MP had sought the help of four MPs to assess and report on worklessness in different types of areas. Phil Wilson MP for Sedgefield had been asked to look at coalfields and other older industrial areas. The Secretariat had met the MP and produced a briefing for him. This action was endorsed by the meeting.

6. Skills report

6.1. This report was in the final stages of production after ratification of the text by the National Elected Officers. The meeting was updated on preparations for the distribution and launch of the report.

7. European funding

7.1. A paper from the Secretariat on post-2013 European Funding had been submitted to the December NGM and referred back for detailed consideration to the Policy Advisory Group.

7.2. The three recommendations from the Policy Advisory Group were discussed by the Executive: to support the re-nationalisation agenda; that the Alliance gives priority to the new EU State Aid rules; that the Secretariat be asked to begin discussions with civil servants at DBERR. These recommendations were agreed by the Executive.

8. Manufacturing and steel

8.1. This was part of a process of developing work relevant to local authorities with a continuing direct interest in UK steel production. A paper had been referred back to the Policy Advisory Group by the December NGM for detailed consideration.

8.2. The suggestions for the Policy Advisory Group were that the Alliance should start arguing for a re-balancing of the UK economy in favour of manufacturing; that manufacturing should become one of the Alliance's core issues; that workforce skills would be a good place to start. These suggestions were agreed by the meeting.

8.3. Cllr Wright (Rotherham) reported on a meeting of senior elected members from local authorities that faced job losses in the recently announced cutbacks by Corus. This matter had also been discussed by the National Officers on the evening of 29 January.

8.4. After discussion it was agreed that, in order to respond to the current crisis, the Alliance should secure additional services from Peter Slater (Director, Alliance Wales) to help co-ordinate appropriate activity with help from the National Secretariat.

9. Health inequalities

9.1. This report covered a joint meeting of the Alliance with the Improvement and Development Agency for Local Government (I&DeA) and the most recent allocation of funding to Primary Care Trusts (PCTs) in England

9.2. In discussion reference was made to the importance of joint work with the I&DeA and other bodies and the potential role of scrutiny by councils of PCTs. It was agreed to continue work with the I&DeA in anticipation of a major event within the next nine months and to continue to monitor funding allocations.

9.3. Alliance Scotland reported on a planned meeting to discuss aspects of EU policy on health inequalities in the West of Scotland.

10. Regeneration audits

10.1. The Audit Commission had produced a report on local authorities and coalfield regeneration— *A mine of opportunities*. The Secretariat was exploring the option of a seminar to follow up the report, with the involvement of the minister, John Healey MP. It was agreed to endorse this course of action.

10.2. The National Audit Office had begun a separate study into the role of central government in coalfield regeneration. It was reported that the Secretariat had facilitated a visit to regeneration sites in North Derbyshire and the Audit Office had expressed interest in visits to other areas.

11. Homes and Communities Agency

11.1. A number of activities were underway to try to build a good relationship with the new Homes and Communities Agency. These included a meeting with the Chief Executive, Sir Bob Kerslake and a visit to North Derbyshire by the Vice-Chief Executive, Eamonn Boylan. The meeting noted these activities.

12. Sub-National Review

12.1. There were continuing concerns that about the role of district local authorities in the Leaders' Boards proposed by the Government after the Sub-National Review. An exchange of correspondence between the Alliance Chair and the relevant Minister, John Healey MP, accompanied this agenda item. The minister's response indicated that the Secretary of State would reject any plans for Leaders' Boards that did not provide adequate representation from district councils. This was welcomed.

13. Lottery funding

13.1. The National Chair had written to the Secretary of State at DCMS, Andy Burnham MP, requesting further research on the take-up of lottery grants in older industrial areas. A reply from a junior minister accompanied this agenda item and indicated the Department would not carry out the research as requested. However, the minister asked the Alliance to continue to work with DCMS officials on lottery issues and a further meeting had been arranged.

13.2. Alliance Scotland reported on preparations to respond to the Big Lottery consultation. It was also reported that Alliance Wales had prepared a response.

13.3. The North West Region informed the meeting that the Secretary of State, Andy Burnham MP, had been invited to a meeting of Alliance North West.

14. Parliamentary groups

14.1. The Alliance (and previously Coalfield Communities Campaign and SteelAction) has worked with Parliamentary Groups for many years. However, none of the Groups, as currently constituted, are ideally suited to help take forward the Alliance agenda. It was therefore, decided to ask the Secretariat to explore ways of improving the effectiveness of the Alliance's work with Parliamentary Groups.

15. EUR-ACOM AGM: report back

15.1. Details of the business of the EUR-ACOM Annual General Meeting (11 December 2008) were outlined to the meeting. Particular reference was made to the second attempt to secure EU funding for a further exchange of experience project with Wigan MBC as the lead UK partner.

16. Wales IB conference: latest plans

16.1. The meeting was updated on preparations to hold a conference on Incapacity Benefit in Wales in conjunction with the Bevan Foundation.

17. Scotland officer

17.1. It was reported that the appointment had been made to provide additional officer support in Scotland. The new officer, Anne Houston, introduced herself to the representatives present.

18. Regional reports

18.1. Midlands and South region reported that Glenis Willmott MEP had been elected Chair of the UK Socialist Group in the European Parliament.

18.2. Each other region indicated that all business had been covered in the main agenda.

19. Any other business

19.1. There was no further business and the Chair closed the meeting.