

Making Localism Work TOGETHER!

Jonathan Owen
Chief Executive



First Six Months at NALC

- My background
- Out and about
- Listening and Learning
- First impressions: diverse, committed, passionate
- First impressions: up for the challenge, enthusiastic to deliver
- Great opportunity – Fresh Start



About NALC

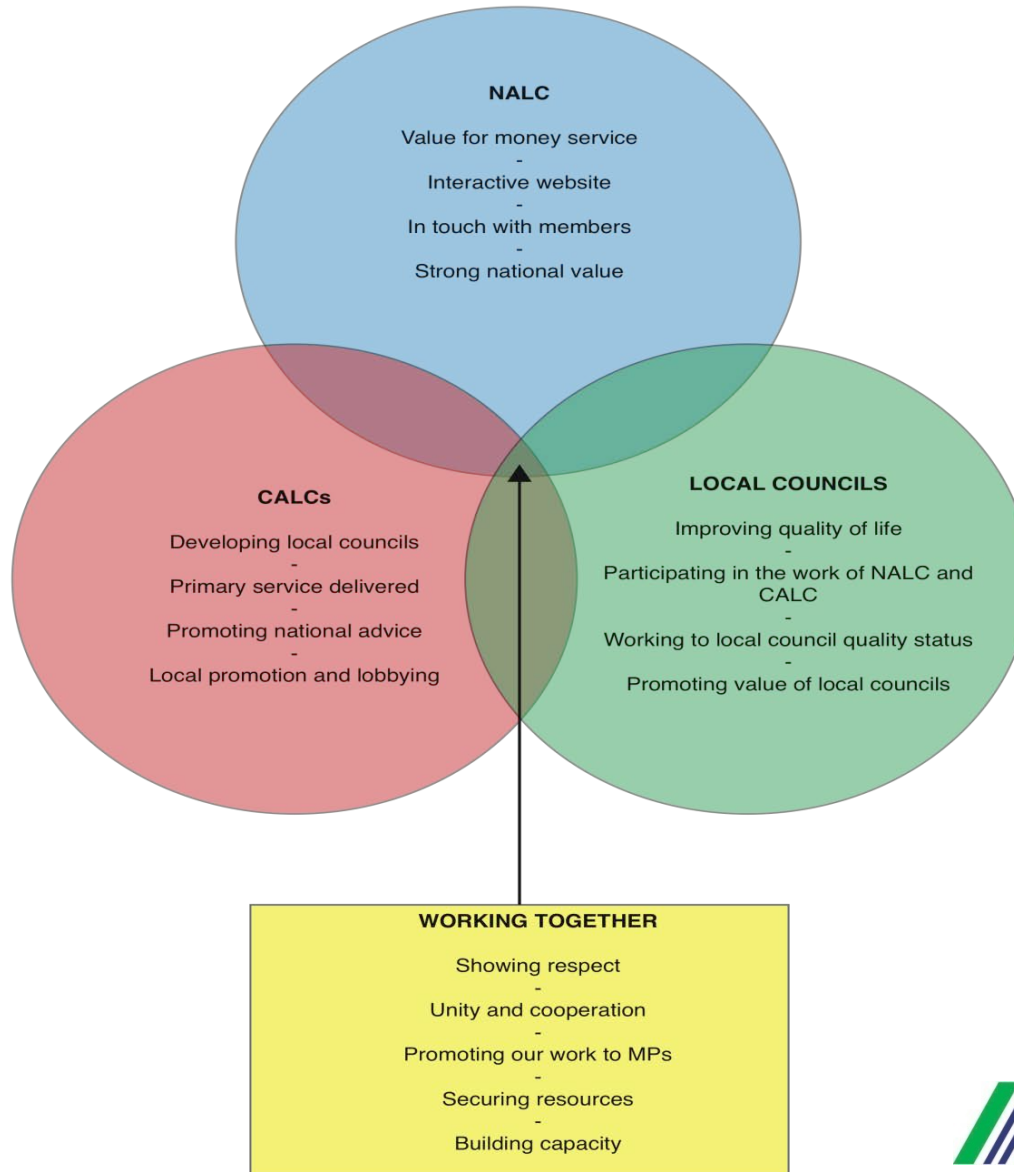
Strengths

- Influential – role on DCLG Partnership Board
- Committed councillors, eager for change
- Quality services
- Small HQ - £1m (70% affiliation fees, 30% income) 14 Staff.
- Great partners in CALCs

Improvements

- Communications
- Are we providing the right services for you to deliver localism?
- Engaging councillors and CALCs in policy making and lobbying
- Customer focus
- Develop partnerships including CALCS & SLCC





A New Future: NALC's strategic plan

Three clear priorities

- To deliver quality services to member councils and county associations
- To create new councils and grow membership
- To promote and represent the sector effectively.



Value for money services

Build on what we have

- 100 + legal topic notes
- 700 Legal queries dealt with
- High quality publications: Local Councils Explained, LCR, Audit Practitioners Guide
- 60+ press releases a year, twitter reach of 200,000
- 22 Consultations responded to last year
- 100 Ministerial and other meetings
- Excellent conferences too – thanks Katie!

Improvements

- Review our services to ensure meeting new needs
- Promote improvement and development
- Consider new ones
- Procurement/Employment/planning/ ICT advice?
- Larger towns offer
- Audit- sector led body
- New website – digital first



New councils- a growing sector

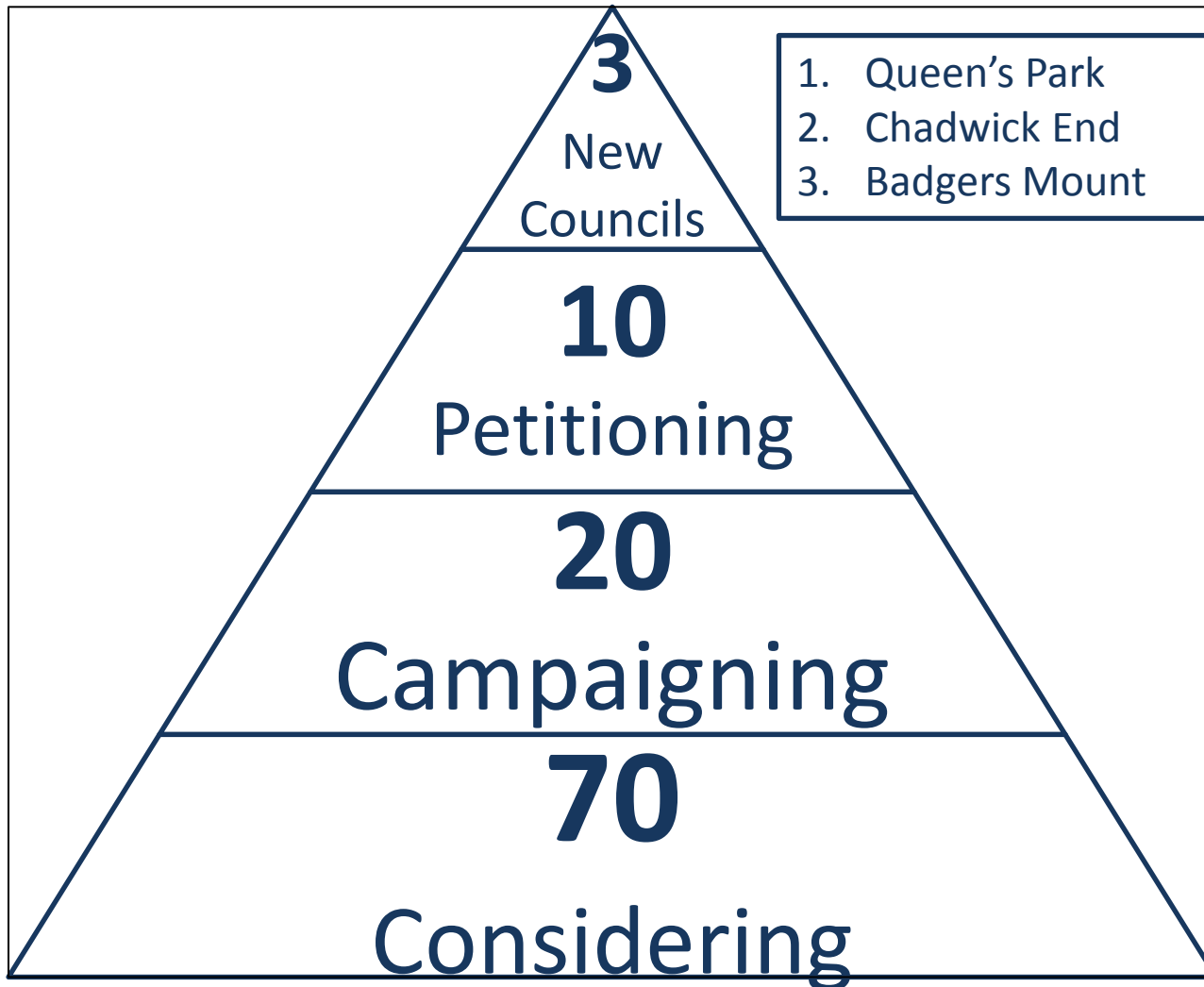
2014

- 41 campaign areas assisted
- Nearly all CALCs receiving funding for outreach work
- First Create a Council week held
- 3 new councils created (Penrith today?)

Next steps

- Deliver 2015 programme
- Persuade Governments to continue campaign
- Core cities? Unitary Government?
- Membership pack and benefits for existing councils





100 Communities, ½ m people 

Priority 3 – A Strong National Voice

Lobbying successes

- All parties committed to localism
- Finance: referenda principles, council tax support scheme – but more to do
- Cheque reform
- Electronic agenda
- National media coverage (see next slides)
- Need your help

Next steps

- Focussed manifesto with clear objectives
- Increase understanding esp around finance
- Extend influence across Government, with parties and think tanks
- Build sector's reputation
- Campaigning together – local, regional and national advocacy

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RADIO



PM

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Afternoon news and current affairs programme, reporting on breaking stories and summing up the day's headlines



 **NALC**

Love your parish council

Sunday Times, 27 April 2014

Love your parish council. That's where real power is wielded



RICHARD GIRLING

Last month I had a run-in with my parish council in Norfolk – a misunderstanding over a planning application, swiftly resolved. I confess to having felt irritated by what seemed at the time a busybodyish intervention, but it occurred to me that this was a healthy sign of local democracy doing its stuff. It may sometimes be inconvenient, but it is always necessary. I should have been glad that someone was making sure I wasn't going to blight the village.

It is a timely thought. With relaxed planning laws threatening to let slip some pretty mangy architectural dogs, the voice from the parish pump is in urgent need of amplification. Small communities are soft targets, easy dumping grounds for housing quotas and other inconveniences that planners want to shift from their desks and that developers want to convert into dividends. Villagers in particular need someone to wield the pitchfork on their behalf, and it is the parish councils that man the dykes and the hedges.

The National Association of Local Councils calculates that England has approximately 9,000 "first-tier" parish and town councils, with 80,000 elected councillors serving more than 15m people – 35% of the population. Scotland has about 1,200 community councils, and Wales 735.

Parish councils have three essential functions. They pass the views of their communities to the administrative tiers above them. They work to improve or sustain local character and quality of life. They provide services. These can include commons and open spaces, burial grounds, car parks, lavatories, village halls, war memorials, sports grounds, litter bins, footpaths, street lighting, bus shelters and much else besides. Much of it is, like housework, a thankless task noticeable only when it is left undone.

Though there may be a tendency towards conservatism, councillors for the most part wear their politics lightly, loyal only to their neighbours. Reading the minutes of my own parish council, I find no

clue as to how its members might vote in an election – a refreshing change from the caucus-room factionalism of district, borough and county councils, with all their "chairs" and "cabinets".

In March the government announced plans to make it easier for communities to start new parish councils. I have to confess I was surprised. I had supposed that the number of councils was historic, fixed and immutable. But it is not so. Parish councils were a creation of the Local Government Act 1894, originally just in small rural towns and villages, but subsequent revisions have made it possible to establish one in pretty much any civic parish – rural, urban or metropolitan – anywhere in the country.

There are some 200 more parish councils in England now than there were 13 years ago, and a further 98 communities are considering or actively in the process of forming new ones. To my astonishment, the first of these will be in the heart of London, on the very doorstep of centralising power in the borough of

Westminster. On May 22 the people of Queen's Park ward will elect the capital's first new parish council since 1963.

Last year's Sustainable Communities Act at last gave a bit of practical encouragement to the idea of "bottom-up" governance. Councils with ideas on how to develop their parishes can now make their proposals directly to the secretary of state without becoming locked in a game of Chinese whispers with the intervening tiers of government. You could say this was localism and the big society astride the same horse.

Some good things are happening. More than 400 councils are in the process of drawing up neighbourhood plans, identifying areas that might be suitable for development, protecting green spaces and setting design standards for new buildings. But there is bad stuff going on too. Planning authorities are still too apt to believe that their wider responsibilities allow them, "in the public interest", to dismiss local opposition as Nimbysism. Worse: some £3.8m of government funding intended for

parish and town councils is not being passed on by a small number of rogue local authorities, leaving deprived parishes with a choice of legal action or cutting services. "Scandal" is not too big a word for this.

There is injustice, too, in the fact that since 1990 parish councils have received no share of business rates, reducing local companies to the unwilling role of cuckoos in the nest, taking more from local communities than they are able to give back.

Those of us living in the country are not clinging to a mead-round-the-maypole vision of Merrie England. We want the best of urban culture – broadband speeds measurable in something better than bytes per fortnight, a detectable mobile phone signal and less architectural ticky-tacky.

Councillors who give up their time to work for these things, or for their urban equivalents, are the true representatives of the "grass roots" to which politicians pay so much glib and slithery lip-service. They deserve better than they get.

Charles Clover is away

Challenges ahead

- Delivery – NALC, CALCs and Councils
- 2015 council elections - “Your Community Needs You!” and supporting new councillors
- 2015 national elections and ensuring role, profile and influence of local councils enhanced
- New Quality Council Scheme
- Working together to improve local communities.



New Opportunities too

- Today's vote in Scotland
- New constitutional settlement for the UK?
- Greater devolution to cities and regions?
- Parish and Town Councils (and community councils in Wales and Scotland) must be included too.
- NALC manifesto : Stronger Local Democracy
- NALC manifesto: Fairer funding
- NALC manifesto : More powers