

IMPROVEMENT AND DEVELOPMENT BOARD | AGENDA

6 September 2021, 11:00 – 13:00.

The meeting will be open from 10:50 for pre-meeting conversations and to resolve any technological issues. There will be a short break at 12.00 and the meeting will then continue if necessary

Via Zoom.

1. Apologies for absence and introductions

- 1.1. Board to receive introduction to NALC new Project Officer and IDB support, Lisa Etchell.

2. Minutes from previous meeting

- 2.1. Recommended action: to approve the minutes of the last meeting of the Improvement and Development Board held on 11 May 2021.

Appendix 2.1

3. Discussion item : Devolution update

- 3.1 Board to consider update paper attached and implications for IDB activity

Appendix 3.1

4. Discussion item: Developing the role of County Association Local Councils (CALCs)

- 4.1 Board to consider paper from Sally Longmate

Appendix 4.1

5. Councils: raising the standard

IDB National Intervention Panel and Peer Review

- 5.1. Peer review and national intervention panel – to agree recommendations in paper attached
- 5.2. Civility and respect working group – to note update paper attached

Appendix 5.1

Appendix 5.2

- 5.3. NALC update on improvement matters including: an update on Local Council Award Scheme and the E-Learning Project. **Appendix 5.3**

6. Officers: professional development

- 6.1. Board to receive an update on Certificate in Local Council Administration (CiLCA).
6.2. SLCC update on improvement matters

7. Updates on improvement and development initiatives

- 7.1 Local Government Association (LGA) update** Verbal report
Board to receive an update
7.2 Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) update Verbal report
Board to receive an update

8 IDB forward work programme

- 8.1** Board to discuss items to be considered at future Improvement and Development Board meetings. **Appendix 8.1**

9 Dates of future meetings

That the next meeting of Improvement and Development board be held on 18th November 2021



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APPENDIX 2.1 DRAFT MINUTES | IMPROVEMENT AND DEVELOPMENT BOARD

11 MAY 2021

Present:

Jonathan Owen, NALC chief executive; Cllr Sue Baxter, NALC national chairman; Helen Quick, SLCC head of conferences, training & education; Elisabeth Skinner MBE, SLCC academic leader; Linda Carter, SLCC branch rep; Alison Robinson, Gloucestershire county officer; Sally Longmate, Suffolk county officer; Helen Jenkins, LGA principal adviser – leadership; Cllr Richard Parry, Kent Association of Local Councils

Also present:

Philip Clifford, LGA senior advisor; Tony Blake, Shared Intelligence programme director; Anders Hanson, NALC projects manager; Justin Griggs, NALC head of policy and communications; Linda Hammond, NALC project officer

1. Apologies for absence and introductions

Apologies were received from Rob Smith, SLCC chief executive.

The board also took the opportunity to acknowledge Jonathan Flowers in his absence and wish him well in recovery. Jonathan Owen informed the board that he will be chairing the board in the interim.

Board members were also provided the opportunity to introduce themselves.

The board welcomed Cllr Richard Parry as a new member and Helen Jenkins returning from maternity leave.

2. Minutes from previous meeting

The minutes of the meeting held on 18 March 2021 were approved.

3. Devolution

- 3.1. Philip Clifford provided background on the devolution work that the LGA has engaged in, with respect to the Devolution White Paper.

Tony Blake gave a verbal presentation on the work Shared Intelligence had undertaken, as part of the joint working with the LGA. This included:

research, interviews and workshops. Engagement for the project mainly involved working with principal authorities, however some local (parish and town) councils were involved as well.

It was noted that the framework was mainly aimed for principal authorities. Furthermore, the contents of the toolkit were mentioned.

Tony Blake mentioned key themes that had emerged with regards to devolution and delegation. This included frustrations encountered by both principal authorities and local councils. The importance of creative discussions as a solution was also highlighted. He also went on to mention that where relationships have gone well, these places have gone beyond what had been agreed in membership charters.

The verbal presentation concluded on raising four points: fruitful action comes from fruitful dialogue, investment is needed from principal authorities, flexibility is needed and patience is important.

The board were also informed that this is expected to be published soon.

Jonathan Owen thanked Philip and Tony for the presentation and mentioned whether it would be possible to view the draft version. Philip Clifford also mentioned the opportunity to have joint communications for the launch. Tony Blake added that there is a possibility for further case studies to be added to the document.

Justin Griggs raised the point regarding next steps and seeing how principal councils and local councils can work together on recovery.

Resolved: Following the launch of the report, there should be another session to discuss next steps.

Sally Longmate shared experience of clustering taking place in the east and highlighted the importance of training and development for councils.

4. IDB forward work programme

- 4.1. The board noted the items already submitted for the forward work programme.

Board members discussed apprenticeships, to attract new breed of professionals into the sector. The discussion also considered the possibility of degree apprenticeships.

Alison Robinson reported that she had been looking into the recruitment of apprentices in Gloucestershire.

Sally Longmate mentioned principal authority graduate schemes and suggested that some of the placements for those schemes should include opportunities to work within the local council sector.

Helen Jenkins provided insight on possible plans for the LGA graduate programme to expand to include further parts of local government.

Elisabeth Skinner mentioned SLCC's engagement with De Montfort University politics students and Alison Robinson shared experiences from her locality.

Resolved: professional development opportunities should be included on the work programme.

Cllr Richard Parry shared his principal authority experience and potential difficulties. Helen Jenkins mentioned that LGA and NALC could work together to identify councils where there is a good relationship and potentially pilot a placement.

Resolved: NALC will take forward the suggestions for the work programme. The civility project should be prioritised on the list and NALC/LGA peer challenges should also be included.

5. Councils: raising the standard

The board received a verbal update on the Local Council Award Scheme statistics from Anders Hanson and Linda Hammond.

Cllr Sue Baxter expressed interest in the numbers for reaccreditation, which would be looked into further and followed up by NALC.

6. Officers: professional development

The board received a verbal update from Elisabeth Skinner MBE on CiLCA statistics.

Cllr Richard Parry queried the take up of the CiLCA qualification. Elisabeth Skinner MBE mentioned that the qualification is celebrating its 20th year and also some of the barriers for students completing CiLCA.

Cllr Sue Baxter suggested that having pass rates statistics for the qualification would be helpful.

Alison Robinson shared that there is a good uptake in her locality and how she often encourages smaller councils to start with the ILCA qualification. Sally Longmate also highlighted the importance of trainers and preparing for CiLCA.

Elisabeth Skinner MBE informed the board that there will be a survey circulated in the autumn to evaluate CILCA 2021 and this will be reported back to the board in a future meeting. Cllr Sue Baxter suggested that councils be included in the survey. Elisabeth Skinner MBE advised that this would be followed up by the CiLCA OPS group.

7. Updates on improvement and development initiatives

Helen Jenkins shared on the LGA's digital focus and agreed to follow up with NALC on improvement and development initiatives.

Elisabeth Skinner MBE provided an update on the developments of FILCA (The Financial Introduction to Local Council Administration), which is expected to be launched later in the autumn.

To be discussed at the next improvement and development board meeting.

8. Dates of future meetings

The meeting dates provided on the agenda was noted. The next meeting in July may not be face to face but final arrangements will be confirmed.



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APPENDIX 3.1 DEVOLUTION UPDATE | IMPROVEMENT AND DEVELOPMENT BOARD

6 September 2021

IDB Remote meeting

1. Devolution white paper

2. The Improvement and Development Board (IDB) has recognised the role that the [National Improvement Strategy for Parish and Town Councils](#) can play in supporting the local (parish and town) council sector to realise its potential to deliver benefit to their communities through the activities they undertake, further empowerment and the devolution of services, and an enhanced role as place shaper.
3. The Board has held a number of discussions to explore how the sector could be supported to make the most of any opportunities provided by the Government's devolution agenda and anticipated white paper; and where resources and additional investment could usefully be deployed to enable that.
4. This white paper is understood to be repackaged to focus on the Government's priorities around levelling up and recovery, with further detail expected during the Conservative party conference at the start of October or shortly after.
5. It therefore makes sense for the IDB to take stock of these policy developments and revisit possible areas for support including from the Government and the Local Government Association (LGA).
6. These were envisaged to cover themes such as civility and respect in public life, local leadership and levelling up and devolution. A further update will also be provided to the meeting.

7. Levelling up and county deals

8. In the [Prime Minister's levelling up speech in July](#), he announced new deals for counties to devolve power to local communities, setting out his ambition to offer areas beyond cities "the same powers metro mayors have gained", calling for areas to "come to us with a plan for strong accountable leadership.....with your vision for how you will level up, back business, attract more good jobs and improve your local services".
9. According to reports in the local government trade press by The MJ, "Areas that are expected to bid for a devolution deal include North Yorkshire, Surrey, Suffolk, East Riding and Hull, Devon and Hampshire. A further band of county

areas are holding fire until after publication of the Levelling up White Paper and are likely to bid for later deals. They are believed to include Staffordshire, Kent, Dorset, and East and West Sussex. Central Bedfordshire, Worcestershire, Oxfordshire, Lancashire and Northamptonshire are not expected to be among those at the front of the queue.” Local authorities were asked to register interest in piloting county devolution deals by mid-August.

10. Feedback suggests that some of these county deals will include an enhanced role for the local council sector and that discussions in some areas involve representatives from county associations of local councils.
11. It is also worth noting that a number of the government’s current strategic funding programmes are also aimed at supporting the levelling up agenda such as through the Towns Fund, Levelling Up Fund, Community Renewal Fund and Community Ownership Fund.

12. LGA report on developing local council role in service delivery and place shaping

13. As the IDB will recall, the LGA’s People and Places Board commissioned Shared Intelligence to develop a framework for principal councils looking to support local councils to play an increased role in local service delivery and place shaping.
14. [A delivery framework to support parish and town councils](#) was subsequently published on 11 August to which members of the IDB, county associations and local councils contributed directly or through round table meetings.
15. The report includes a number of case studies from local councils and county associations, identifies a framework to underpin closer working between the tiers and to support devolution and levelling up, a toolkit for developing and implementing the framework and includes a series of reflections containing some factors that would need to be addressed to promote wide take-up.
16. The timing of the report is helpful and would appear to be a useful starting point for an agenda for discussion with principal councils – county and unitary councils in particular – to help shape the development of county deals which are currently being worked up. All the evidence is that it is best for the sector to engage with these discussions early and not wait for involvement.
17. NALC have been invited to attend the next meeting of LGA’s People and Places Board to discuss further how the content of this report can best be cascaded and its principles adopted. The IDB may wish to identify other appropriate initiatives and opportunities too.

18. Other reports

19. A number of other national bodies and think-tanks have also published reports around devolution, place-shaping and levelling up, some of which the sector has been able to engage with and influence.
20. The 'mood music' in many of those is to be supportive of the sector. Typical of these is work from centre right think tank Onward, whose report [The Politics of Belonging](#) called for any devolution proposals to include provisions to make it easier to set up new parish councils and give them additional powers.
21. A further report by Onward for the National Farmers Union (NFU), [The Rural Economy and Levelling Up](#), again stressed the importance of the 'local' and further work includes a short report on the sector and its role in levelling up and repairing our social fabric.
22. In their report [Pillars of community: why communities matter and what matters to them](#), the Centre for Social Justice says "Parish council-level representation provides a vital, highly local level of democratic accountability and decision-making" and goes on to back NALC's [Prospectus for Ultralocalism](#) and in particular measures aimed at creating more local councils.

23. Barriers

24. It would seem sensible to consider potential barriers which the IDB and others could help overcome so the sector realises its potential at this time.
25. The LGA report highlights lack of clarity about legal powers; low number of contested elections; the wide variety and scale of the sector and the need for joint working or clustering; and the lack of capacity and ambition in some councils.
26. In his contribution to the Onward/NFU report, Richard Holden MP (who is also the co-chair of the All-Party Parliamentary group on local democracy) commented on some of these themes:

"In the UK, it is parish, district and county councils, and MPs in a position of constituency leadership that are the mechanisms for the daily running of communities, the protection of their interests and planning for their future. They play a vital role in our democracy. Councillors are able to listen and address local grievances and their permanent presence means that policies can be enacted well and in respect of local practices. However, the reality can often fall short of this. In 83 local authorities, there are no parish councils at all and in 37 there are five or fewer. Handforth's viral Zoom council meeting exposed some of the weaknesses of those councils that do exist. This should concern us. Local democracy is essential but without proactive local

governance, the potential of rural communities will be left untapped while the rest of the country seizes the opportunity that recognising the need to level up provides.”

27. The Smaller Authorities’ Audit Appointments (SAAA), which was set up by NALC and the Society of Local Council Clerks (SLCC), have highlighted the continued inability of many local councils, especially parish meetings, to complete even the most basic financial return to the external auditor, with 540 councils and 319 parish meetings still to submit their Annual Governance and Accountability Return (AGAR) or certificate of exemption at the end of July.
28. While much of IDB’s strategy is designed to address these challenges, the strategy was published in 2016 and the IDB should consider a refresh in light of recent experience.

29.Recommendations

30. That IDB consider the outline proposal for support from the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government.
31. That the IDB consider the LGA report and identify ways for it to be used and promulgated.
32. That the IDB consider undertaking a refresh of the strategy.



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APPENDIX 4.1 DEVELOPING THE ROLE OF CALCs | IMPROVEMENT AND DEVELOPMENT BOARD

County Associations and officers – support and development

Introduction and background

Across the UK there is a network of county associations providing a range of high quality sector specific services to town and parish councils. These organisations, whilst independent and autonomous bodies, are primarily funded by constituent local councils and together contribute financially, via membership fees, towards the National Association of Local Councils.

The existence of county associations is strategically significant. They form a bridge for both central and local government to the grass roots, or first tier, of the sector and actively embrace collaboration focussing on 'place' and 'people'.

With numerous examples of successful collaborations and partnerships at a local level, success stories are often shaped and influenced by the knowledge, skills and expertise of county associations who, when invited to be involved, bring focus and practical application that enable citizens and communities to play their part in local governance.

This success is built on local knowledge, strong relationships and regular interactions with community leaders, clerks, principal authorities, MPs and other representatives. It demonstrates the value of a county-level service and the contributions they make to help support strong and sustainable communities.

County officers are influential and multi-talented leaders and a critical component to supporting the network. Despite variances in delivery models and service offers, there are a number of common issues and challenges associated with the role and the network itself.

COVID has had a significant impact on the sector and county association teams have been on the front line supporting local town and parish councils during what has been a very challenging period. The sector has received significant praise for stepping up and meeting the needs of the most vulnerable in our communities and has demonstrated even further the value of hyper local.

With an increased focus on localism an opportunity exists to understand in more detail the state of the sector from a grass roots perspective. In the past such exercises across the network have concentrated on measuring the county association model – such as number of staff, funding, service offer. Some county associations use a range of metrics in this regard such as number of qualified clerks, councils aligned to the local council award scheme for example or % of membership to help demonstrate quality of service.

The metrics from the sector network could be more influential and potentially inform decision making. For example, it could measure the degree of community action in relation to climate and environmental matters, youth engagement, planning and infrastructure by understanding the number of active neighbourhood development plans by way of example. It could also measure and consider the extent of voluntary time local councils put into supporting and serving their communities and the contribution clerks make, the roles they play and the cost to the public purse to help influence improvements in relation to pay.

In 2006 research was carried out by the Commission for Rural Communities (CRC) which aimed to develop a means of identifying what constitutes a successful county association and to gather data on ways in which they could meet these criteria in order to develop models of and recommendations about good practice. It examined funding, staffing, services and leadership and resulted in a number of recommendations.

Purpose of this paper

A small group of county officers have set up a task and finish group to identify key issues in relation to county associations and the county officer role. The driver was to explore smarter ways of working, seek ways the network could help itself especially in relation to health and wellbeing as a result of recent and ongoing demands.

The group met in June and have produced an action plan (appendix 1). This paper to the Improvement and Development Board (IDB) is an outcome from this work.

The IDB is asked to consider providing support, guidance and potentially access to resources to help the task and finish group:

- evaluate the existing support available across the network in relation to advice, guidance, strategies, service delivery, models, resourcing, structures, fees etc., with a view to assessing if it is fit for purpose with ever increasing demands now and potentially in the future as a result of localism and,
- to assist with the development of a training programme for county officers to support sector growth and resilience that is centrally funded and open to all.

The IDB's attention is drawn to the example service offer list below which demonstrates not only the work county associations undertake but to understand how this role is fundamental to the success of the sector and the opportunities it offers.

The driver for this piece of work has come direct from county associations represented in the task and finish group (listed below) who have identified a number of issues. Like many parts of the sector the last 18 months have brought many challenges and county officers regularly report they are constantly firefighting with increasing demands. Examples include re-structuring to form unitary authorities, managing expectations of member councils with an increasing need for support with more complex legal questions, lack of skilled officers and the need to increase interest and recruitment to the sector, calls for increased partnerships and

collaborations with other stakeholders who recognise the value county associations as representatives offer especially with green agenda, loneliness, health and wellbeing, youth, volunteers etc.

The IDB is also asked to recognise the work the task and finish group has already started which includes a buddy scheme for new county officers and the development of a network of expertise for more experienced officers. The development of a MS Teams site to share information and network and an exercise to explore smarter ways of working – looking at standard templates and digital solutions to manage members, newsletters, bookings and enquiries.

The task and finish group would also like to seek ways to improve processes, reduce duplication and mechanisms to influence national strategic plans, services and support.

Outline of county association service offer

Please note, like all areas of the public sector, not only the demographic of the county but the structure and operating model of the county association both influences and determines the service offer. This list below is just an example and it should be noted that the majority of county associations are involved in some but not all of the following service outputs:

- ◆ *development of a business plan and core objectives linked to local strategies and desired outcomes*
- ◆ engagement, representation, collaboration and partnership working across both local, regional and national networks for a variety of reasons including joined up working, efficiencies, influencing decision making etc.,
- ◆ creation of multi-skilled teams primarily focussed on tangible outcomes fee paying member councils directly benefit from that ensures the taxpayer is receiving value for money
- ◆ knowledge and expertise that is available as an advisory service that is up to date, provides practical support and guidance quickly and efficiently with adequate succession planning and business continuity built in for periods of absence due to the size of the team
- ◆ delivery of core training for councillors and clerks using, where available, national portfolios and materials and a vast range of topics tailored specifically for the sector
- ◆ the management of multi-agency projects nationally and locally including co-production and solutions with commercial partners such as e-learning, digital services, marketing and communication.
- ◆ creating digital presence and services (e-learning, online resources, interactive website) including social media, e-newsletters, podcasts, virtual discussion forums and networks
- ◆ the development of additional member services focussing on needs of local town and parish councils to aid efficiency and resilience including

payroll, internal audit, consultancy, recruitment and temping services,
new clerk's mentoring.

County Associations aligned to the task and finish group

Gloucestershire ALC

Devon ALC

Herts ALC

Bucks ALC

Worcs ALC

Somerset ALC

Leicestershire ALC

Cambs and Peterborough ALC

Norfolk ALC

Cornwall ALC

Kent ALC

Derbyshire ALC

Suffolk ALC

Lincolnshire ALC

APPENDIX 5.1 PEER REVIEW AND NATIONAL IMPROVEMENT PANEL | IMPROVEMENT AND DEVELOPMENT BOARD

6 September 2021

1. Peer review

2. The Improvement and Development Board (IDB) published the [National Improvement Strategy for Parish and Town Councils](#) in 2017 which recognised that “The best local councils go above and beyond their legal obligations, demonstrating efficiency and transparency in all their work and continuously seeking opportunities to improve and develop even further; one such tool for council development could be by Peer Review for example.”
3. The Board subsequently agreed to pilot a Peer Review approach to improvement for the largest local (parish and town) councils based on the Peer Challenge model used by the Local Government Association (LGA).
4. The pilots were developed in partnership with the LGA as part of a wider package of support and joint work with the LGA through their funding via a Memorandum of Understanding with the Ministry of Communities, Housing and Local Government.
5. Prior to the Covid-19 pandemic, the IDB oversaw the delivery of two pilot peer reviews of [Chippenham Town Council](#) in September 2019 and [Falmouth Town Council](#) in February 2020.
6. The peer review teams comprised clerks and councillors who had received trained training from LGA, a NALC officer who also co-ordinated and supported the reviews, plus an LGA officer from their peer challenge team.
7. There was broad agreement at that time to continue with this programme and the LGA agreed to provide support. A number of larger councils expressed an interest.
8. Due to the pandemic this programme was paused, although the LGA’s [peer challenge offer](#) was developed into remote peer support comprising Recovery and Renewal Panels, Bespoke Remote Peer Support and a Remote Corporate Health-Check.

9. NALC has been in discussion with the LGA about restarting this programme and building on the two pilots, proposing two physical peer reviews and two remote panels for 2021/22. A further verbal update will be provided at the meeting.

10. National Improvement Panel

11. The strategy also identifies the need to address poor performance in the sector, recognising “that the greatest improvement in the sector is achieved when those councils that are in the most danger of poor performance, or are currently performing poorly, acknowledge that this is the case and that they need to seek help”.
12. Poor performance occurs when a council fails to comply with statutory and financial requirements and establish positive relationships, and takes a number of forms including qualified audit and accounts, unlawful procedures and decision-making, serious conflict within the council and with the community and other incidents of law-breaking.
13. Support to address these problems is already provided in a number of ways by county associations of local councils and key stakeholders such as the Society of Local Council Clerks.
14. The IDB has also overseen engagement by NALC and SLCC in individual local councils of particular concern and which were also on the government’s radar.
15. Over the summer, NALC and the relevant county association have been working with a principal council which has experienced long-term issues with a particular local council and where local support and intervention has not been successful.
16. NALC was aiming to use this opportunity to develop and pilot a national framework for intervention, building on the peer review work but covering local councils deemed to be facing challenging circumstances. Unfortunately this particular opportunity is no longer able to be pursued at this time.
17. Nevertheless, in order to take forward the task identified in the strategy of considering new or different support to poor performing local councils, it is still desirable to continue to develop and pilot a national framework for intervention.

18. At this stage it is envisaged such an approach would comprise:

- a national improvement panel which would be available for use by any local council with long-term governance, performance or other difficulties;
- the panel would be activated by the relevant county association with the agreement of the monitoring officer of the principal council;
- the panel would consist of representatives from the following as appropriate: a nationally appointed clerk and councillor (potentially from the panel that currently supports peer review), representatives from the principal council and county association, a regional representative or advisor from the LGA.
- the local council would need to express its support by passing a resolution confirming it would take part positively with the panel and adopt a one-year improvement plan as recommended by the panel which would include working towards securing accreditation under the Local Council Award Scheme (LCAS);
- the local council would fund the support to ensure buy-in;
- the process could include an initial self-assessment followed by individual discussions on aspects of that self-assessment, a meeting between the panel and local council to discuss and agree the improvement plan, an event with the whole council to address the improvement plan, and a follow up meeting six-months later.
- On-going support would also be provided for the local council's clerk and chairman as well for working towards working towards securing accreditation under the Local Council Award Scheme (LCAS).

19. **Recommendations**

20. That the IDB support restarting the peer review programme.

21. That subject to support being confirmed from the LGA, the IDB supports the delivery of two physical peer reviews and two remote panels in 2021/22.

22. That the peer review programme continues to be targeted at the largest local councils in membership of NALC.

23. That NALC seek expressions of interest from largest local councils in membership of NALC.
24. That the IDB supports the establishment of a national framework for intervention through a national improvement panel.
25. That the national improvement panel be piloted.
26. That a pool of clerks and councillors for the national improvement panel be recruited and provided with any necessary training.



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APPENDIX 5.2 CIVILITY AND RESPECT WORKING GROUP | IMPROVEMENT AND DEVELOPMENT BOARD

6 September 2021

IDB Remote meeting

1. Working group established

A Civility and Respect Project Working Group has been set up consisting of the following:

County officers: Carina Helm; Sarah Mason; Neil Wedge
NALC: Cllr Sue Baxter; Cllr Mike Drew; Cllr Mark Kidd
SLCC : Lee Dunkley; Linda Larter; Steven Trice
OVW : Paul Egan

2. Joint statement agreed

It agreed at its meeting on 28 June 2021 a joint statement committing to promote civility and respect in public life. The statement, which summarises the core aims and values for securing permanent change in the local (parish and town) council sector, reads:

“Civility and respect should be at the heart of public life and good governance is fundamental to ensuring an effective and well-functioning democracy at all levels.

The intimidation, abuse, bullying and harassment of councillors, professional officers and staff, in person or online, is totally unacceptable; whether that is by councillors, professional officers, staff or members of the public.

This can prevent councils from functioning effectively, councillors from representing local people, discourage people from getting involved including standing for election, and undermine public confidence and trust in local democracy.

The National Association of Local Councils (NALC), county associations and One Voice Wales (OVW), as the membership organisations representing the first tier of local government in England and Wales, and the Society of Local Council Clerks (SLCC) as the professional body for clerks, are committed to working together to promote civility and respect

in public life, good governance, positive debate and supporting the well-being of councillors, professional officers and staff.

To that end the group will be working to deliver tangible resources, actions and interventions in four main areas: providing councils with the tools to support good governance; lobbying to strengthen the standards regime and encourage more people to get involved; training; and processes to intervene to provide support to struggling councils."

3. Work to date

On tools, a number of documents have been identified for potential sharing and updating and a number of new products may be required. These will include the good councillor guides which the IDB has overseen.

A proposed methodology for a local resolution protocol has been circulated for comment and approval by the working group.

The LGA has produced a new model code of conduct with supporting advice which replaces the previous NALC model. County officers will be considering its operation in the Autumn. As part of its [civility in public life](#) it has also developed a range of resources to help councillors handle intimidation and promote digital citizenship. These resources are available to our sector. A survey is also planned to identify councillors' experience which will be circulated to our sector too which NALC will analyse.

A [government letter](#) has indicated a commitment to respond widely on the committee on standards in public life recommendations though as yet no time frame has been indicated other than "shortly." SLCC has written to the MHCLG permanent secretary to discuss the issue of standards generally. NALC has been in discussion with the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman about extending its remit to include the sector.

NALC is continuing its make a difference campaign to encourage more people from different backgrounds to stand for election and is currently [surveying](#) experience of the last set of elections.

The meeting also finalised agreed to jointly fund and appoint a fixed-term project manager. An offer of appointment has been made and it is hoped they will start in early October. They will be employed by NALC, based in the team which also supports the work of the IDB.

4. Implications for IDB

There are clearly areas of synergy and overlap between the work of the civility and respect group and the IDB which will need managing to ensure complementary activity.



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AGENDA ITEM 5.3 MEMBERS SERVICES UPDATE | IMPROVEMENT AND DEVELOPMENT BOARD

6 September 2021

1. Local Council Award Scheme

2. The Local Council Award Scheme continues to have strong interest and take up as a part of our council improvement offer. As of the end of July, 38 councils had achieved an award in 2021. 17 of these were handled by their county association with the other 21 assessed by the national panel run by NALC. 17 were at foundation, 10 at quality and 11 at quality gold.
3. We have a further 22 councils going to national panels in round two and four already submitted for round three.
4. We have faced a number of challenges in the first half of this year which has led to some delays with the national panel. Our projects officer Linda Hammond left in early May before the conclusion of round one, which meant that between then and the start of August we didn't have the dedicated staff resource for LCAS that we would have normally. It also created a knowledge gap with large parts of the process being reliant on staff who had had no previous involvement and understanding of the time and communications needed at different stages of the process.
5. Round one is fully completed. Round two is going to accreditation panels in September with the results announced in October (two months later than originally advertised). The deadline for applications to round three will be delayed from 10 September to 8 October with all results announced by 21 January (which is around a month later than originally advertised).
6. We now have a new projects officer Lisa Etchell who will have day to day responsibility for LCAS, along with three other staff members who are involved in different parts of the process. This is already making a big difference and we have identified a number of parts of the process that can be streamlined and gaps in the communications to be filled, that will help ensure that despite the delays LCAS will be in a much stronger position in the future.
7. Alongside these process changes, we are also looking at improving the guidance given to those applying that will help explain more clearly the requirements for each of the criteria, getting panel members together

outside of panels to improve consistency in the results, and using experienced panel members to help chair panels. This will help give us extra capacity to further promote the scheme and increase the number of councils who take part.

8. Online learning

9. We started a pilot of online learning towards the end of 2020. This uses a platform provided by Nimble e-learning who already worked with a number of county associations. Courses were initially offered to 17 county associations as a part of this pilot, although in the end only eight of those actively enrolled participants on to the courses on offer. Across those eight associations there have been 457 enrolments to date, with Nottinghamshire and Dorset accounting for around half of those.
10. A final report on the pilot is yet to be written, however the feedback so far has largely been very positive and we expect to make this a part of the general NALC offer. Not all counties are likely to take part, however many offer their own courses via Nimble or on an alternative platform.
11. The courses currently on offer are largely general workplace type courses created by Nimble but adapted by NALC to make them relevant for local councils. This includes courses such as health and safety, home working, data protection, equality and diversity, etc. We also offer two courses created by Warwickshire on planning and an introduction to local councils. We will be expanding the range of local council specific courses available, and this includes four courses currently being written by Breakthrough Communications on communications, social media and data protection.
12. We were informed in July that the South West associations have decided to have their own contract with Nimble e-learning rather than being a part of the national arrangement. This will allow them to create their own courses but we have yet to discuss if they wish to access any of the courses created by NALC or what the cost of this would be to them.

13. Website redevelopment

14. An ongoing project is the redevelopment of our website to ensure that it is easier to use and provides a much improved range of services to members and a shop front to the outside world.

15. Over the first half of this year, a company called Heavy Penguin have undertaken research into our existing website and testing its use and usability by NALC members. This work has now concluded and has identified a number of major changes that are needed to the website, especially with regard to the search function and how people find information.
16. We will now be moving on to the next phase where we identify our requirements for a new NALC website with the intention of launching a new website in February 2022.
17. **Good councillor guides and other publications**
18. We currently have a range of good councillor guides available to members via our website. Our most recent publication is on cyber security produced by our partners Microshade.
19. In October we will be producing a new guide on website accessibility which is designed to help ensure local council websites meet the best standards and comply with the law. The guide has been produced for us by Aubergine and is designed in particular to help clerks inform their website companies on the requirements needed.
20. We are also currently working on updating our guide on data protection. The existing information was produced anticipating the introduction of GDPR but is being rewritten by Breakthrough Communications to take in to account how this has worked in practice and any changes since. We expect this to be available before the end of the year.



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APPENDIX 8.1 FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME TEMPLATE | IMPROVEMENT AND DEVELOPMENT BOARD

Suggestions for future agenda items	Author/originator	Target date	Board meeting dates
Communications – how we can better work together	?		<ul style="list-style-type: none">• 6 Sept 2021• 18 Nov 2021
Knowledge bank	?		
Civility and respect project	NALC/SLCC	6/9/21 - update	
National improvement panel	NALC	6/9/21	
Targets to increase CILCA and LCAS	NALC/SLCC		
Professional development of clerks inc apprenticeships	?		
Awareness raising campaign re clerk as a career	NALC		
Board members are invited to identify other matters			



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