

6 SEPTEMBER 2021

IMPROVEMENT AND DEVELOPMENT BOARD | DRAFT MINUTES

Present:

Jonathan Owen, NALC chief executive; Cllr Sue Baxter, NALC national chairman; Helen Quick, SLCC head of conferences, training & education; Sue Hobbs, SLCC; Pauline Whitehead, SLCC; Sally Longmate, Suffolk county officer; Wendy Amis, Derbyshire county officer; Cllr Richard Parry, Kent Association of Local Councils; Lusi Manukyan, LGA senior advisor - Improvement & Policy; Adam Keppel-Green, SLCC branch rep.

Also present:

Jane Moore, NALC senior solicitor and head of member services; Justin Griggs, NALC head of policy and communications; Lisa Etchell, NALC project officer.

1. Apologies for absence and introductions

Apologies were received from Rob Smith, SLCC chief executive and Elisabeth Skinner MBE, SLCC academic leader – Sue and Pauline were in attendance for Elisabeth.

Jonathan Owen took the opportunity to inform the board that Jonathan Flowers will be standing down before the end of the year, when his term comes to an end. He was still keen to be involved in championing digital issues and relationship building.

The board thanked him for his service and wished him well for the future. A replacement chair will be discussed at the next meeting of the board. In the meantime, Jonathan Owen would chair.

Board members were also provided the opportunity to introduce themselves and welcome new attendees.

2. Minutes from previous meeting

The minutes of the meeting held on 11 May 2021 were approved.

3. Discussion item: Devolution update

- 3.1 Jonathan Owen introduced the report ahead of the government's devolution white paper expected in October and its implications for the role of the board. Key points included the development of county deals, the LGA report on developing local council roles and improving working between the tiers, further reports referencing the role of town and parish councils and the barriers holding the sector back. In previous devolution discussions the board had agreed a set of issues including seeking funding for support and capacity building from MHCLG and LGA.

Justin Griggs advised of ongoing, joint working discussions with the MHCLG and LGA colleagues. Sector improvement work included an outline proposal consisting of three strands: standards in public life, local leadership and levelling up/devolution. The aim was to create a rationale for government investment and would be delivered through a small scale programme this year and used as a building block for future years.

Other needs had been identified through the civility working group that would need investment, publicity and a refresh of the National Improvement Plan (NIP). Campaigns were also planned for clerk recruitment, diversity/inclusion and encouraging people from all backgrounds to stand for election. County association engagement was also taking place around county deals.

Cllr Sue Baxter suggested that the greatest challenges were around engaging with non NALC/SLCC members and disengaged councils. She highlighted previous difficulties of putting principles into practice and mentioned cascading the report through to principle authorities via county associations. It was noted that many were already doing this.

Sally Longmate advised that Suffolk were initiating a senior leadership team 'fly on the wall' session between upper tier councils and parish councils that she was happy to share the results of when complete. She suggested a bottom up learning approach, particularly on operational issues.

Lusi Manukyan mentioned that the LGA were happy to undertake joint activity and support NALC with this work in promoting their report.

Helen Quick advised that SLCC 2022 events dates had now been finalised and she was happy to discuss presentation opportunities for NALC/LGA on the report.

Discussions were also held concerning councils that do not have strong relationship with their principal authorities.

Resolved: The Board agreed

That the outline proposal for support from MHCLG be supported and JG circulate the funding bid.

That the LGA report on developing local council role in service delivery and place shaping be welcomed and county associations and councils encouraged to use it in discussions with upper tier authorities. The report should also feature in events and publications produced by the SLCC, NALC and the LGA.

That the Board support a refresh of the NIP and its delivery plan in the light of any white-paper and funding allocation.

4. Discussion item: Developing the role of County Local Associations (CALC's)

- 4.1 Sally Longmate gave an over view of the report and associated action plan which had been drawn up with a number of county association colleagues. Key points included county officers 'firefighting' on a day to day basis due to current challenges, providing a service that was proportionate rather than one size fits all and the start of a buddy scheme supporting new and experienced county officers. The emphasis was on leadership skills, managing workloads/partnerships and better county officer understanding. She asked the board to look at accessibility, collaboration and smarter ways of working. This could include standardisation across the sector for advice and guidance, with centrally controlled templates.

Members of the board welcomed the report and in particular the emphasis on greater consistency across county associations. However, it was recognised that resources were constrained and increases in affiliation fees difficult unless underpinned by value for money considerations. Sally indicated that the report was not about raising affiliation fees but securing some support for targeted professional development and support.

Councillor Parry suggested that it would be helpful for county associations to learn from each other and share good practice.

Jonathan Owen added that wider investment in county associations and councils was vital if the objectives of the NIP were to be delivered.

Resolved: That the report be commended and given further consideration by NALC and county associations. Elements should be included in any funding bid set out above.

5. Councils: raising the standard

IDB National Intervention Panel and Peer Review

- 5.1 Jonathan Owen gave an overview of the proposals in the report, including recommendations to relaunch the peer review program and recruitment of a 'pool' of clerks and councillors to support .It was also agreed to use that pool to underpin a national intervention panel for use with councils with protracted challenges at their request and with the support of the county association and monitoring officer.

Resolved:

That the Board support restarting the peer review programme and 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.

That the peer review programme continues to be targeted at the largest local councils in membership of NALC and that NALC seek expressions of interest from largest local councils in membership of NALC.

That the IDB supports the establishment of a national framework for intervention through a national improvement panel and that the national improvement panel be piloted.

That a pool of clerks and councillors be recruited and provided with any necessary training.

- 5.2 The board noted the report setting out the work of the Civility and Respect working group and agreed that its relationship with the board needed further consideration.
- 5.3 The board received an update from Jane Moore on various project areas and improvement matters as outlined in the report. Key points included

Local Council Award Scheme statistics, successes and challenges of the year; an update of the on-line learning pilot scheme and an outline of the website redevelopment.

The board welcomed the news that as of the end of July, 38 councils had been accredited under the award scheme this year.

6. Officers: professional development

- 6.1 The board received a verbal update from Helen Quick on CiLCA statistics. Overall completion rates for 2021 were 89% compared to 55% last year, although 2020 figures had been slightly skewed due to the pandemic.

209 clerks had registered for CiLCA in 2021 with 187 awarded to-date. On ILCA, 263 clerks had registered and 180 passed.

She welcomed any input from county associations on how best to present future statistics which would be discussed at the ops group. She also reported that a financial package for clerks and RFOs – FiLCA, would be launched this month.

She noted that some county associations offered bursaries for CiLCA training and indicated that SLCC was happy to advertise details of CALC training events on the website.

- 6.2 Helen Quick also reported that the SLCC would be celebrating its 50th anniversary in 2022. Virtual training delivery had so far proved popular, so next year's events would likely be a hybrid mix. The SLCC national conference in October would be an in-person event.

7. Updates on improvement and development initiatives

7.1 LGA

The board received a verbal update from Lusi Manukyan on LGA matters. She reported that from an LGA perspective the peer review programme had been very successful and they were happy to support it along with the Make a Change campaign. Further discussions to take place between the LGA and NALC in respect of these.

Lusi noted that the focus of LGA work had been supporting councils through COVID and its priority now was the funding challenge facing councils.

7.2 **MHCLG**

No report was received.

8. IDB forward work programme

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

Sally Longmate requested that development for County Officers be included, along with looking at a centralised on-line information/knowledge bank. She specifically referred to Local Councils Explained (LCE) and what was planned for the review, along with the online “Model Council”.

Jane Moore advised that NALC were looking at a revised LCE and additional resources would be needed.

Sally Longmate mentioned she was happy to share Suffolk’s online information, currently being worked on including videos, templates and policy documents.

Board members also discussed the appointment of an independent chair following Jonathan Flowers departure. A small group would be set up to discuss ideas and formulate an action plan/strategy, including how MHCLG funding would feed into this.

Resolved: That these items be added to the forward plan and Board members identify any future items and the IDB secretariat will use to inform future agendas.

9. Dates of future meetings

The next meeting date of 18th November 2021 was noted. Future dates to be determined.



Published by NALC on behalf of the Improvement and Development Board

© NALC 2021