

## **IMPROVEMENT AND DEVELOPMENT BOARD | DRAFT MINUTES**

22 June 2022

### **Present:**

Jonathan Owen, NALC chief executive; Helen Quick, SLCC head of conferences, training & education; Wendy Amis, Derbyshire county officer; Cllr Richard Parry, Kent Association of Local Councils; Sally Longmate, Suffolk county officer; Sue Hobbs, SLCC; Alison Robinson, Gloucestershire county officer; Lusi Manukyan, LGA Senior Advisor - Improvement & Policy; Mia Shelton, LGA and Albert Joyce, DLUHC.

### **Also present:**

Charlotte Eisenhart, NALC head of member services and Lisa Etchell, NALC projects officer.

### **1. Apologies for absence**

Apologies were received from Cllr Keith Stevens, NALC national Chair; Adam Keppel-Green, SLCC branch rep; Elisabeth Skinner MBE, SLCC academic leader; Pauline Whitehead, SLCC; Rob Smith, SLCC chief executive; and Anders Hanson, NALC project manager.

### **2. Minutes from previous meeting and matters arising**

The minutes of the meeting held on 17 March 2022 were approved.

No matters arising.

### **3. Discussion Item: Chair Recruitment**

- 3.1 Board was invited to discuss the specifics and role of Chair and agree the commencement of a recruitment process (paper and Board TOR's circulated with agenda).

Charlotte Eisenhart outlined the need to recruit an independent Chair to the Board, suggesting it would be useful to advertise for a candidate with the relevant background, experience and knowledge. A £250 per day remuneration fee for the role had been agreed and discussions around timeframes and the selection process needed to take place. She welcomed

suggestions from the Board for any key individuals they thought would be suitable.

Cllr Richard Parry raised concerns that £250 per day could be perceived as a low rate and could deter interest from some experienced candidates. He suggested someone with experience of parish and town councils, would be preferable to those from upper tier councils. He also requested the use of the word 'altruistic' in the advert and if the word 'honorary' could be used instead of 'fee'.

Charlotte advised that next steps would include drafting a person spec and updating the Board's existing TOR's. She would also research funding levels for other types of similar roles.

ACTION: CE to draft the person spec and update the existing TOR's and circulate to the Board for further discussion.

**Resolved: The Board agreed to the commencement of a Chair recruitment process and to begin seeking expressions of interest.**

#### **4. Councils: raising the standard**

##### **Peer Challenge**

- 4.1 The Board received an update on the peer challenge from Charlotte Eisenhart. She reported that it had been agreed that two corporate peer challenges could take place this year. Cirencester Town Council had been identified as the first, with work commencing after the summer. Plans were underway to identify a second council preferably further afield than the Southwest region, to get a good geographical spread.

The peer team will consist of representatives from NALC, LGA, a clerk and a councillor. Jonathan Owen would also be joining the team. As a clerk or Councillor had yet to be identified, she welcomed suggestions from the Board for any suitable individuals that may be interested, ideally from Quality Gold status councils. NALC were happy to carry out training sessions where needed.

Although only two challenges were being carried out this year it was expected that in 2023 there will be a more open call to eligible councils. It

was recognised that a better recruitment process with a draft spec for future candidates was also needed.

Lusi Manukyan added that there was a need to build a 'pool' of trained up peers. She welcomed any suggestions from the Board and asked them to get in touch with their ideas.

Jonathan Owen suggested that Charlotte and Helen take forward any advertising for expressions of interest on the relevant NALC/SLCC websites.

### **Peer Support - Bingham**

- 4.2 The Board received an update on peer support from Jonathan Owen. He reported that the Board had previously agreed to pilot an approach to supporting struggling councils. NALC had been approached by Rushcliffe Borough Council and Bingham Town Council, Nottinghamshire, to compile a panel and undertake an independent review that could help identify steps to a path of improvement for Bingham. The panel's report went to the town council's annual meeting in May and was unanimously agreed to be taken forward, with an action plan in place. Link to report: [https://www.bingham-tc.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/9.-Appendix-C-Bingham\\_Improvement\\_Board\\_Rep\\_31\\_5\\_22.pdf](https://www.bingham-tc.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/9.-Appendix-C-Bingham_Improvement_Board_Rep_31_5_22.pdf)

He added the process had allowed the council to gain an objective view on its issues and had been both helpful and healing. He invited the Board to build on this and advised that NALC would be happy to support any interested councils, once they had recognised their issues and were ready for the process.

Wendy Amis queried whether there should be any involvement from County Associations or officers. Jonathan suggested that overall, it was good for them to be part of the process, but that some areas of work may fit their involvement more than others.

Charlotte Eisenhart stressed that intervention should only take place once all other options and usual avenues or channels of support had been exhausted. Each council should be looked at on a case by case basis, rather than a standard rule approach.

Sue Hobbs suggested problems need to be addressed at the earliest stage possible and that there could be opportunities for internal auditors to become involved.

Jonathan added that as this was a pilot process, lessons could be learnt before publicising the offer of support more widely.

4.3 The board received an update from Lisa Etchell on various project areas and improvement matters as outlined in the report. Key points included:

- Local Council Award Scheme: 12 applications in current round (x 4 Quality Gold, x 2 Quality and x 6 Foundation). Panel assessments to commence early July.
- Recently introduced changes to streamline scheme internal admin process have increased efficiency. Further improvements continue to be made. Better understanding of criteria/assessment process for all.
- Promotional events: Next on-line event to help with LCAS application preparation scheduled to take place on 23 June.

Helen Quick requested that the LCAS/CiLCA advert be promoted in LCR magazine.

Charlotte Eisenhart added that NALC would look at better promoting the award scheme to help encourage a higher take up.

ACTION: LE to request LCAS/CiLCA advert be included in the final edition of LCR magazine, if possible.

The Board welcomed the efficiency improvements to the Local Council Award Scheme administration process and looked forward to further updates on the progression of marketing for LCAS/CiLCA and On-line learning.

#### 4.4 **Data Collection/GPC**

Charlotte Eisenhart reported that there had been issues with collecting GPC information from many councils, with poor results from the County Officers surveyed. She asked the Board for any suggestions on how to get better data in this area.

Sally Longmate suggested that baseline data collection needed to be fluid and kept up to date and having agreed data sets would be useful.

Jonathan Owen referred to the NALC GPC data spreadsheet with a low rate of response (to be circulated to Board members with the minutes).

ACTION: LE to circulate GPC Spreadsheet with the minutes of the meeting.

## **5. Officers: professional development**

- 5.1 The board received a verbal update from Helen Quick on CiLCA and FiLCA statistics and improvements. She reported that:

The content for ILCA and FiLCA was currently being revisited in relation to legislation/feedback, ensuring the needs and aims of the courses were being addressed. Both qualifications continue to be popular.

CiLCA Stats – Bi-monthly reporting now taking place. Pre 2015 totals: 1163 registrations, 817 passes and 17 still studying. Registrations have now stopped. For the 2021 portfolio: 476 registrations, 87 passes, 347 still in time and 42 out of time.

- 5.2 Sue Hobbs gave an update on SLCC improvement matters. She reported that an assessment had been undertaken showing 6 out of 43 CALC's not delivering CiLCA and SLA's this year. This information enabled scope to target particular areas/clerks.

Most training was taking place on-line now, so geography was no barrier. A priority in coming months would be working on returned peer reviews. Various Hub access users with an 'unsure' status had also been identified. These would be contacted and confirmed.

Helen mentioned she had asked NALC to include a link on their webpages to the SLCC website. She also reported that only 50% of SLA's had been received within deadline.

SLCC were now offering in-person events, with their 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary conference taking place in November. Civility and Respect webinars were also available on the SLCC website.

Elisabeth Skinner MBE had been out 'on the road' reaching students and had managed to raise over £1,300. Two overseas trips for students had

been arranged for July/Oct to help encourage an understanding of other countries' local council framework and processes.

Jonathan Owen suggested Sue and Helen could attend future CALC meetings to advise and update.

ACTION LE/CE to send CALC meeting details to Sue Hobbs and Helen Quick.

## **6. County Officers: professional development**

6.1 A CALC update and county association workstream from Sally Longmate was circulated with the agenda. She outlined the key themes as follows:

- Support for new county officers (Buddy Scheme): Alignments of buddies to new officers now active. She reported rewarding for all and excellent initiative.
- Support for experienced county officers: Draft survey to be circulated to identify interest/areas of expertise and capacity.
- Communication Strategy: Mock SharePoint site set up for review with Cloudy IT. Funding agreed with NALC to fund extranet/hub site development.
- Smarter Working: JAMS user group set up to share knowledge/data etc for efficiencies. Demo recorded and shared across network. Legal User group exploring merits and costs/options.

Cllr Richard Parry noted there was a high churn rate of County Officers.

Sally raised the issue that the role was challenging, with a heavy workload, bringing about a high turnover. She also highlighted the need for help through independent support, particularly from legal partners.

Various suggestions were put forward for improvements to CiLCA, including more council specific pieces of work and more development work, in particular around county associations/standards, rather than just qualification based.

## **7. Updates on improvement and development initiatives**

7.1 **LGA**

The Board received a verbal update from Lusi Manukyan on LGA matters. She advised she would be taking maternity leave from August and that her colleague Mia Shelton would be replacing her as the LGA liaison and support representative on the Board.

She reported that peer challenge support from the LGA was now in place and Cirencester town council (as discussed above in item 4.1) were participating. She highlighted the need to seek council participation from outside of the Southwest region and welcomed suggestions by the Board.

In other support, an £18 million government grant had been agreed in relation to leadership/challenges/support. The LGA were happy to extend to NALC and local councils, with conversations to take place in the near future. Potential support was also being looked at around Chair skills and other LGA website offers that would be extended to NALC and councillors.

Mia Shelton introduced herself to the Board and signposted members to the outlined support offers for 2022/23, available on the LGA website.

## 7.2 **DLUHC**

The Board received a verbal update from Albert Joyce on DLUHC matters. He reported that, in relation to the government's Levelling Up White Paper commitments, discussions were taking place on the sequencing/timescales of the neighbourhood governance review. Decisions were expected once ministers had agreed how to take this forward.

Sally Longmate highlighted the need for good relationships between parish/town councils and their respective county councils. She raised concerns that demands and expectations on clerks were increasing so any support, particularly in the professional and legal areas, would be helpful.

The Board looked forward to receiving the timescales for the neighbourhood governance review, once agreed.

## **8. IDB Forward work programme**

- 8.1 The board noted the work programme for 2022/23 (Appendix 8.1 attached).

**Resolved: That the work programme for 2022/23 should be carried forward.**

## **9. Dates of future meetings**

The next meeting of the Improvement and Development Board will be on 14 September 2022.



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