

IMPROVEMENT AND DEVELOPMENT BOARD | DRAFT MINUTES

17 November 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; Adam Keppel-Green, SLCC branch rep and Rob Smith, SLCC chief executive

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; Pauline Whitehead, SLCC; Alison Robinson, Gloucestershire county officer and Mia Shelton, LGA Senior Advisor - Improvement & Policy.

2. Minutes from previous meeting and matters arising

The minutes of the meeting held on 22 June 2022 were approved.

No matters arising.

3. Discussion Item: Chair Recruitment

- 3.1 Board was invited to discuss and agree person specification for role of Chair and updated IDB Terms of Reference (paper and Board TOR's circulated with agenda).

Charlotte Eisenhart outlined the person specification and asked members for comments. Advertising for the role would commence, once agreed and following the last board meeting, a list of suggested candidates put forward would be contacted. She welcomed any further suggestions from members and advised that a further update on progress, applicants and next steps would be given at the next meeting.

Members thanked Charlotte for her work in getting together the draft person specification and welcomed its content and presentation.

Cllr Richard Parry suggested the section detailing the actual 'person specification' should be moved onto the front page for more impact.

Resolved: The Board agreed to commence with the advertisement to recruit a Chair and seek expressions of interest.

4. Discussion Item: Tackling Underperformance

- 4.1 Board was invited to discuss intervention proposal to help support and improve underperforming local town and parish councils (paper circulated with agenda).

Jonathan Owen outlined the proposals which included establishing national criteria, triggering intervention where needed and publicising support already in place for struggling councils. Past work with County Officers and the Civility and Respect project had helped to identify current support methods, but other processes were needed.

A range of methods could be conducted to identify dysfunctional councils, such as a model checklist. There was scope to use a similar model to the one used in the LGA peer challenge review, with Bingham Town Council used as an example. County branches and Monitoring Officers could also be encouraged to help identify issues. Steps to support could include training and introduction/aspiration to LCAS.

He welcomed views from members and sought volunteers to help with the checklist and involvement with the pilot. It would be developed over the next year or so.

Charlotte Eisenhart highlighted the importance of objectivity for the process.

Sue Hobbs suggested there was an opportunity to use the Internal Audit Network to help with identifying councils at risk of dysfunctional behaviour.

Sally Longmate mentioned the need to involve County Associations as they were on the 'frontline.' She agreed there was value in using the data

produced in internal audit trends but stressed against using a 'one size fits all' approach.

Adam Keppel-Green raised concerns that standards for internal audits weren't currently regulated.

Resolved: The Board agreed to convene a workshop in 2023 to discuss how to identify criteria to objectively assess councils as underperforming. Further investigations will be taken up with the Internal Audit Network, SAAA, Paul Hoey, CO's, clerks and principal councils to be involved in the process.

5. Discussion Item: Workforce Strategy

- 5.1 Board received an update from Charlotte Eisenhart on the workforce survey and workshop with the LGA and the National Employment Strategy Advisory Group.

She attended the recent Advisory Group meeting which began discussions on the process of developing a new workforce strategy for 2023. There were currently no timescales yet, as the process was still at the survey design/delivery stage.

The LGA would be subsidising the survey and its workforce team would support with creating the new strategy. NALC would cover the rest of the costs and were currently engaging with them to get a broader picture over benchmarking, understanding workforce roles, contract hours and T&C's etc.

The Good Employment Guide would be updated by early March next year and there had been progress in updating the National Employment Contract. She added that the focus for the coming year was putting together/mapping the strategy and advised further updates would be brought to the Board.

Adam Keppel-Green questioned how this work related to evaluation of clerk's pay and it was confirmed this would be addressed in the process.

ACTION: CE to share LGA presentation slides given to the National Employment Strategy Advisory Group.

Resolved: The Board agreed that it should oversee this workstream and receive regular updates.

5.2 Resolved: The Board noted the following motion passed at NALC's AGM (from Northamptonshire CALC):

- 1) That NALC recognises that the workforce challenge is one of the biggest challenges of our time and that there is an issue with recruitment, retention, and capacity in local councils, and
- 2) That NALC engages a consultant to benchmark clerks' terms and conditions.
- 3) The board of Northants CALC sees the issue of clerks' terms and conditions as potentially the single biggest issue facing the parish and town council sector. The issue affects smaller councils to a greater extent than larger councils, but it is not just the rate of pay that is important, it is also the contracted hours. The board thinks that a benchmarking exercise would be useful, to review the role of the clerk, how many hours the job takes, and what an appropriate rate of pay is.

6. Levelling Up and Regeneration Bill

- 6.1 Board was invited to note that the new Prime Minister will review the next steps in relation to the Levelling Up and Regeneration bill: [Levelling-up and Regeneration Bill - Parliamentary Bills - UK Parliament](#)

Jonathan Owen highlighted the need to ensure that the sector was well-resourced moving forward. He welcomed that the DLUHC Minister, Lee Rowley MP, undertook to explore various discussions raised from his attendance at the recent NALC Empowering Communities conference.

Resolved: The Board noted that the new Prime Minister will review the next steps in relation to the Levelling Up and Regeneration bill.

7. Councils: raising the standard

Peer Challenge

- 7.1 The Board received an update on the peer challenge, including reviews and support from Jonathan Owen.

He reported that the current peer review with Cirencester Town Council was going well with a further one planned for next year involving Morecambe Town Council. He highlighted the need to recruit new clerks and councillors to be part of the peer group and would follow this up once a process had been established. Training would be given by the LGA.

NALC update on Improvement Matters

7.2 The board received an update from Charlotte Eisenhart on various project areas and improvement matters as outlined in the report. Key points included:

- Local Council Award Scheme: 21 applications in current round (x 4 Quality Gold, x 3 Quality and x 14 Foundation). Panel assessments commenced in November. Deadlines for next year's award scheme were published on the NALC website.
- Next on-line event to help with LCAS application preparation scheduled to take place on 23 November. The LCAS/CiLCA advert will be placed in the last edition of LCR magazine.
- Online learning modules were now available for enrolment on the NALC website. County Associations could opt out of this service for their members if they wished.
- Cirencester Town Council's corporate peer challenge was currently underway with discussions for Morecambe Town Council to undertake a similar process in early 2023.
- NALC was working with HR partners WorkNest to review/update the Good Councillor's Guide to Being a Good Employer. New version was expected in early 2023.

Various members agreed it was important to raise the general awareness of CiLCA/LCAS to support councils and councillors could be shown that training was worth the investment. It was also highlighted that there was no 'one size doesn't fit all' approach and that cost/resource could be an issue, particularly for smaller councils.

Helen Quick advised a review had taken place of the SLCC document helping to outline costs etc. It was currently at the design stage and would be shared with the Board in due course.

Sally Longmate requested further clarity on the on-line learning modules now centralised with NALC and the 'opt out' choice for County Associations.

ACTION: AH to recirculate previous email sent to County Associations advising of the centralisation of the on-line learning modules.

The Board welcomed the corporate peer challenges, looked forward to the new version of the Good Councillor's Guide and agreed to promote and raise better awareness of CiLCA and LCAS.

8. Officers: professional development

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

ILCA and FiLCA continue to be strong induction channels for both member and non-members of the SLCC.

CiLCA Stats (totals up to 1 November) as follows:

Pre 2015: 2378 passed; 2015 Portfolio: 721 passed with 1032 Registrations, 2021 Portfolio: 131 passed with 536 Registrations (England), 11 passed with 63 Registrations (Wales).

The CiLCA operations team had recently agreed an increase in the registration fee to £450.

In relation to Community Governance, 68 students had registered at the start of 2022. Elisabeth Skinner MBE had almost finished her 'grand tour' of visiting students. This exercise has proved very beneficial in getting to know students and learning about issues affecting their communities.

Helen encouraged Board members to promote these qualifications. The SLCC CPD booklet was also currently being updated.

- 8.2 Sue Hobbs gave an update on SLCC improvement matters. She advised that part of the rationale for the CiLCA registration fee increase, was to provide an on-line platform/forum for applicants. She also reported good enrolment figures for Wales, with many taking advantage of the Welsh Government's bursary scheme.

9. County Officers: professional development

- 9.1 A CALC update and county association workstream from Sally Longmate was circulated with the agenda. In addition, she provided an amendment to the 'County Officer Support and Development' paper. Link to paper: <https://suffolcalc.sharepoint.com/:b:/s/SALCsharingdrive/EdAJlg-Ut3JEkCB9a1JjYncBWcOa5aAfHCPgkFtjllfH-w?e=xMXEI6>

Key themes were outlined as follows:

- **Support for new county officers (Buddy Scheme):** Alignments of buddies to new officers now active. Scheme currently being reviewed. Programme of tasks to be established.
- **Support for experienced county officers:** ALCs to develop proposals for 2022/23 bid. SLCC support being explored. Co-ordination of next steps in exploring development pathways being established. The Board were encouraged to read the Development plan.
- **Communication Strategy:** Action plan has been shared with IDB. Building and testing underway for new ALC extranet (funded by NALC).
- **Smarter Working:** The Model Council video was launched. Survey complete/analysed with wider survey to follow. Due to limitations, the Hub was underperforming, but a framework was being developed with other apps under consideration.

Charlotte Eisenhart added that the impact and benefits of the new officer buddy scheme had already been seen.

Cllr Richard Parry agreed to raise further discussions on CALC improvement through NALC's National Assembly.

10. Updates on improvement and development initiatives

10.1 LGA

No update given. Apologies received from LGA.

10.2 DLUHC

No update given as the Department's representative Albert Joyce has moved to other responsibilities. NALC would be seeking a replacement.

11. IDB Forward work programme

11.1 The board noted the work programme for 2022/23 (Appendix 11.1 attached).

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

12. Dates of future meetings

Board agreed draft meeting dates for 2023. As follows:

- Thursday 16 March
- Thursday 21 June
- Wednesday 13 September
- Thursday 16 November

The next meeting of the Improvement and Development Board will be on 16 March 2023.



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