

## LARGER COUNCILS COMMITTEE | MINUTES

Zoom meeting of the Larger Councils Committee on 19 January 2021 at 11:00 a.m.

### **Present:**

Councillors Peter Astell (committee vice chairman), Phil Barnett, Mike Drew (national vice chairman), Dave Fleming, Paul Harvey (committee chairman), Richard Parry, Peter Quinn, Mark Smith, Sandie Webb, and elected clerks Jane Biscombe, Leah Coney, Carl Hearn and Shar Roselman were in attendance.

Also in attendance: Chris Borg (policy manager, NALC); Justin Griggs (head of policy and communications, NALC); Charlotte Eisenhart (head of member services, NALC), Jonathan Owen (chief executive, NALC), and Mark Davies (CCLA)

### **1. Welcome & apologies**

1.1 No formal apologies had been received by the policy manager for this meeting.

1.2 Mark Davies from CCLA provided a very helpful update on quarterly activity at CCLA since the previous committee session in September 2020. It was expected that growth would occur between quarters 2 and 4 in 2021 and into 2022 in the economy. Unemployment would likely reach 7%. Quantitative easing was at £400 billion with a further £150 billion being injected to the economy by the government. The world economy would likely improve later in the calendar year. CCLA investments remained reliably rock solid, having increased from £10.3 billion in 2019 to £12.4 billion by the end of 2020.

Cash yields on CCLA's deposit fund will remain poor for a significant period of time but returns on the property fund have remained robust with dividend income for 2020 at 98% of the previous year. CCLA Ethical & Responsible Investment initiatives were currently centred on campaigns around modern slavery, climate change, governance and mental health.

**Resolved: To thank Mark for his excellent update and to circulate the CCLA update to the committee in due course.**

## **2. Minutes and matters arising from previous committee Zoom call on 22 September 2020**

2.1 Minutes of 22 September 2020 Committee meeting – these were agreed by the Committee chairman as a correct record of the session.

**Resolved: That the notes from the 22 September 2021 committee Zoom call be accepted.**

2.2 Action Log – There was a brief discussion but it was agreed that the action log of actions from the 22 September Committee session was up to date and all actions had been completed.

**Resolved: That the action log for the period since 22 September 2020 be noted.**

## **3. COVID 19 – Larger councils' update**

3.1 NALC responses to Comprehensive Spending Review and Provisional Local Government Finance Settlement 2021-22

The policy manager provided a short update on NALC's responses since the previous committee session to the Comprehensive Spending Review 2020 and the Provisional Local Government Finance Settlement 2021-22. Many larger councils had lost significant monies. Only small pots of money had been available (on leisure) for local councils to apply to. It was generally agreed that the impact had been unavoidable but that it was poor that the government had not made any funding at all available to compensate local councils during the pandemic.

It was further agreed that during 2021-22 there would be untypically large precept increases to compensate for the lack of government support.

**Resolved: That the verbal update be noted.**

3.2 Round robin committee update on member council local government finance engagement

The committee chairman asked committee members to provide updates on their councils' engagement with their MPs and principal authorities on the matter of local government finance since the previous committee session.

Some larger councils had been hit worse than others during the pandemic, financially, but larger councils had almost all been hit worse than smaller or medium sized councils. The situation in Kent generally was that it had initially the four worst hit areas for infection but now had excellent test centres.

It had not been possible for local councils to provide names of their own keyworkers to the government or principal authorities – this would be reported by NALC at the next MHCLG Ministerial call.

The East Riding of Yorkshire Council had been generous to local councils in its area, though COVID testing in the area had been slow. In Newbury the race course had been used as a big testing centre. In Alton the nearest vaccination centre was 16 miles away.

**Resolved: That the round robin updates be noted.**

#### **4. Membership services update**

The head of member services provided a very helpful update on member services including advice and guidance and other project matters.

There was then a broad discussion around the matters which were operationally still affecting larger councils from earlier in lockdown. The abuse of parks was an issue for some larger councils. Angling was also being stopped around some lakes.

The Local Council Award Scheme criteria had been recently updated to ensure that climate change was factored into every level. Processes were being looked at. The e-learning pilot was ongoing so it had been a positive start to the year.

The remote meetings legislation for the sector expired on 6 May 2021. The government was not seeking to extend that any further. The impacts of local elections being delayed beyond 6 May 2021 were huge – quoracy and tenures being extended too long, were noted.

There was general agreement that local councils could now perfectly easily fit into a Zoom format. But it was considered very difficult for local councils to otherwise be able to hold the Annual Parish Meeting remotely.

**Resolved: That the verbal update be noted.**

## **5. Sharing good practice update**

5.1 The policy manager provided a brief verbal update on NALC's online events which had done financially very well during 2020-21. Several events relevant to larger councils were also being organised. Committee members were encouraged to ask their councils to book onto these events, also into the new financial year.

5.2 It was agreed by the committee chairman that there was no time to take the item today on regional county groupings for larger councils.

**Resolved: That the verbal update and written report be noted.**

## **6. Super Councils' Network Update**

6.1 Cllr Webb spoke to an excellent written report she had compiled after having approached all SCN councils in 2020 as to their current needs as SCN councils, and relationships with principal authorities. The main issues Super council respondents highlighted to Cllr Webb at present were:

- lack of COVID 19 funding;
- communications issues; &
- poor relationships with principal authorities.

The policy manager also provided a brief update on the current SCN cohort. Cllr Parry also provided a brief helpful update on issues facing SCN councils in Kent.

**Resolved: That Cllr Webb be thanked for her excellent written report which should be circulated to the committee.**

## **7. Date and time of next meeting**

To note that the next meeting of the Larger Councils' Committee will take place by Zoom on Tuesday 20 April 2021.