

LARGER COUNCILS COMMITTEE | MINUTES

Zoom meeting of the Larger Councils Committee on 20 April 2021 at 11:00 a.m.

Present:

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

Also in attendance: Chris Borg (policy manager, NALC); Justin Griggs (head of policy and communications, NALC); Anders Hanson (project manager, member services, NALC), Linda Hammond (projects officer, member services, NALC), Mark Davies (CCLA), Katherine Owen (Blachere), Tony Blake (Shared Intelligence) and Philip Clifford (LGA).

1. Welcome & apologies

1.1 Apologies were received from Cllrs. Peter Astell (committee vice chairman), Dave Fleming, Donna Fuller, Mark Harris, Isabel Roberts and Sue Smith.

Re: That the apologies be noted.

2. Minutes and matters arising from previous committee Zoom call on 19 January 2021

2.1 Minutes of 19 January 2021 Committee meeting – these were agreed by the Committee chairman as a correct record of the session.

Resolved: That the notes from the 19 January 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 19 January 2021 Committee session was up to date and all actions had been completed.

Resolved: That the action log for the period since 19 January 2021 be noted.

3. National stakeholder updates

3.1 Stakeholder update from Mark Davies, CCLA

The committee received a very helpful update on CCLA activity in general since the previous committee session. It had been a challenging but fulfilling quarter for CCLA. Many local councils had been engaged with in one to one sessions, and negative yields had been avoided. Part of the CCLA management fee had been waived for this financial year. The CCLA fund had remained steady. More applications were coming in. Arlene Close was being engaged to oversee the suitability report function for the CCLA property fund. This company would help broaden the guidance and advice available regarding suitability reports – it is a well-respected company.

Resolved: That the verbal update be noted and CCLA thanked for the update.

3.2 Stakeholder update from Katherine Owen, Blachere

Katherine Owen from Blachere provided a very thorough and helpful update on the Blachere summer range of lighting which would be very soon available. A second eco-friendly range of lighting was also being launched made entirely and uniquely out of recycled plastic bottles. The committee agreed there was a lot for Blachere to be proud of. The company's anti-pollution credentials were second to none

Resolved: That the verbal update be noted and Blachere thanked for the update.

3.3 Devolution project update from Tony Blake (Shared Intelligence) and Philip Clifford (LGA)

Philip Clifford (LGA) provided a brief overview of the recent devolution project it had funded with Shared Intelligence which NALC had taken part in. It was believed that the Devolution White Paper would be published before the summer. The main factor affecting local councils in the research was the matter of double "onward" devolution. A literature review was undertaken, along with interviews with Chippenham Town Council, a workshop also attended by Tavistock Town

Council, discussions and observations about the potential of onward devolution to local councils.

Tony Blake from Shared Intelligence then provided more detail of the framing of the report. Many frustrations had been elicited from councils interviewed as part of the project about relations with principal authorities. Resource is key. The final case studies have now been completed. The final report will be signed off by the LGA after the local elections on 6 May 2021.

It was generally agreed at the meeting that the whole of England (with local support) needed to be parished, a point which would need to be made in response to the Devolution White Paper. There would need to be a balance of size and geography, though, as ever. Other organisations engaged with were Dunstable Town Council, Saxilby with Ingleby Parish Council, Shotton Parish Council, and the Cornwall, Hertfordshire and Northumberland associations of local councils.

Resolved: That Mark, Katherine, Tony and Philip be thanked for their helpful and excellent updates to the committee.

4. Super Councils' Network update

4.1 To discuss Cllr Webb's comprehensive report on future service delivery by Super Councils

The committee chairman advised the committee that Cllr Webb was not standing again at the local elections on 6 May so had resigned recently from the committee. There was a short discussion during which it was agreed that Cllr Webb had made a huge contribution to the committee and would be sadly missed.

There was then a short further discussion regarding Cllr Webb's SCN report which was generally agreed by the committee to be very valuable and summarised the main issues facing super and larger councils in the sector presently. It was generally agreed that government departments do not broadly understand the work of local councils. There was general agreement that local councils tended to fare better under one unitary authority (at whatever level), that again the rest of

England should be parished, and that SCN councils within a unitary structure had a crucial bridging role to play between local councils and principal authorities. Local councils still need to be supported by principal authorities.

Resolved: That NALC officers be asked to write to Cllr Sandie Webb thanking her for her sterling work on the committee, and that Cllr Webb be additionally thanked for her excellent report.

4.2 To have a short discussion regarding LGA associate membership

The committee chairman introduced this item which had been carried over from the January meeting. The number of SCN councils taking out LGA associate membership had fallen. Was it time to broaden the offer out to larger councils defined as larger according to the current NALC definition? In the discussion it was agreed that the LGA needed to make it much clearer what the tangible benefits of LGA associate membership were – it was unclear at present. It was agreed that if the LGA had a benefits of associate membership pack they could send to NALC, then NALC should send that out to SCN councils.

Resolved: That the option of SCN councils paying for their own associate membership of the LGA be retained, but that NALC officers obtain a benefits of associate membership pack from the LGA and then circulate it to SCN councils.

5. Member services update

5.1 To receive a verbal update from Member Services on the recent review of the Local Council Award Scheme.

The projects officer, Member Services provided a thorough update on the recent review of the Local Council Award Scheme (LCAS). The review had completed and the scheme had been updated with some new criteria at different levels. Lessons from the review had been learnt. There was one new statement at Quality Gold level. Evidence submitted by councils needed to be clearer. The project manager would now be managing LCAS administration.

5.2 To receive an update on the ongoing work of the Improvement and Development Board

NALC had recently engaged with the LGA and SLCC on the Improvement and Development Board, on e-learning updates for the sector. This was discussed at the most recent Board session. The March session focussed on how best the partners on the Board could positively work together moving forwards. The next session would take place on 11 May.

Resolved: That the projects officer, Member Services, be thanked for her two thorough and excellent verbal updates.

6. COVID 19 member updates

6.1 To receive and discuss the national precept levels for the 2021-22 financial year

The committee chairman stated that despite the average (2021-22) local council precept rise being 2.8%, there would still likely be further increases over the next couple of financial years given the pressure COVID-19 has put on local council services and assets. As ever balance was needed, and regular communication both with residents and billing authorities. Newbury Town Councils' precept increase had been 2.23% and Weymouth Town Council's financial situation had improved by simply being realistic about what could be delivered and achieved, and balanced.

There was not time to consider the round-robin update from all committee members on COVID-19 updates.

Resolved: That the report be noted.

7. Young people – national campaign

The policy manager provided a short verbal update on the national youth campaign NALC was currently delivering. Thumbnails on the excellent work some larger councils were doing in this area had been included in the papers for the meeting. There was a short discussion and it was agreed that NALC needed to be clear about the aims of the campaign. It was agreed that the aims were making young people in parished areas more aware of the work of local councils, and vice versa. Yate Town Council had a full programme of youth engagement, and two other larger councils on the committee had currently inactive youth councils.

Resolved: That the report be noted.

8. Date and time of next meeting

To note that the next meeting of the Larger Councils' Committee will take place by Zoom on Tuesday 21 September 2021.

Councillor Paul Harvey,
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