

LARGER COUNCILS COMMITTEE | MINUTES

Zoom meeting of the Larger Councils Committee on 21 September 2021 at 11:00 a.m.

Present:

Councillors Peter Astell (committee vice chairman), 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); Claire FitzGerald (administration manager, for part), Justin Griggs (head of policy and communications, NALC); Chris Harling (Social Value Portal), Luke Perkins (BHIB), and a project representative (National Cyber Security Centre).

1. Welcome & apologies

1.1 Apologies were received from Leah Coney.

Resolved: That the apology be noted.

1.2 To observe a minute's silence for Cllr David Fleming a longstanding direct councillor on this committee who sadly passed away recently.

Resolved: That the committee offer condolences to Cllr Fleming's council and thank it for his sterling service to the committee over many years.

2. Minutes and matters arising from previous committee Zoom call on 20 April 2021

2.1 To approve the minutes of the meeting held on 20 April 2021 and to note any matters arising not covered elsewhere on the agenda.

Resolved: That the notes from the 20 April 2021 committee Zoom call be accepted.

2.2 To note the actions completed since the 20 April 2021 session of the Committee, in the action log.

There was a brief discussion as to when NALC would be considering holding physical committee meetings again. The NALC office was not currently open for external meetings. No NALC events would be taking place physically before the end of March 2022. The query was logged but it was noted that it was not in the gift of this committee to decide when all of NALC's corporate committee meetings took place physically again.

Resolved: That the action log 2021 be noted.

3. National stakeholder update

3.1 Stakeholder update from Luke Perkins, BHIB

The committee received a very helpful update from Luke Perkins of BHIB. NALC and larger councils were welcome to use any other of BHIB's venues nationally if needed. NALC and BHIB would be continuing their strategic relationship in the future. Business interruption claims were proving a large problem. Cyber security risks were also increasing as were risks of theft from employers. More education on risk management was needed. BHIB had recently authored some excellent articles on returning to work which had received good feedback.

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

4. Super Councils' Network updates

4.1 To receive a verbal update on Super Councils' activity from Cllr Richard Parry, SCN representative to the committee

Cllr Parry cited a list of current concerns from SCN councils including bullying, several notable instances for which SCN councils had been unprepared. There was therefore a pressing need to promote the civility agenda. SCN councils wanted to still be able to host remote meetings and at least hold hybrid sessions into the future. Access to funding continued to be an issue. Councillors felt an accountability to represent residents. The 6 month rule was proving difficult to apply. SCN councils still like benchmarking.

Resolved: That Cllr Parry be thanked for his update.

4.2 To receive a verbal update from Chris Harling at Social Value Portal and its potential use by Super / larger councils

Chris Harling of the Social Value Portal (SVP) gave a very helpful short presentation of the work of the portal and its ability to help local government bodies capture and measure the social value yield from their projects. SVP were already engaging with the Kent Association of Local Councils (KALC) on potential work and the portal help better monetisation, and with simpler procurement. Reporting was also more efficient with the portal which was also endorsed by the LGA. 85 local authorities used the services of SVP. Detailed statistics could be produced by the portal by summing all measures delivered by a body and dividing by proxy value. Social value project reporting was particularly useful. SVP also worked closely with central government departments.

Resolved: To thank Chris Harling for his excellent presentation which would be circulated with the minutes for the meeting to the committee.

4.3 To receive a verbal update from a Cyber Security consultant at the National Cyber Security Centre regarding a national cyber security pilot the 72 Super Councils are eligible to engage in

A cyber security consultant from the National Cyber Security Centre promoted a pilot for the 72 Super Councils, free, giving technical support to reduce cyber-attacks in local government. There had recently been digitally advanced, high volume attacks in the local council sector. Web check, mail-check, spamming reduction and inappropriate use of websites were four areas where advice was given. Support to interested Super Councils would be trialled.

Resolved: That the cyber consultant be thanked for his update and that on receipt of his promotional text and PDF, information would be circulated to SCN councils.

5. Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman Coverage

5.1 To discuss and consider the proposal to extend coverage by the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman of the local council sector and how this might operate

The head of policy and communications introduced an item on potential future coverage of local councils by the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman. Context was provided. It was the longstanding position of NALC that all local councils should be covered by the ombudsman.

Michael Hyatt from the ombudsman then provided a very helpful update on the future engagement with the sector from the ombudsman's perspective. The ombudsman would need to be flexible in the future to meet the needs of local government, as it had been since 1974. Local councils are welcomed and valued. There was likely to be a full consultation later in the calendar year. Pilot work would likely follow that over the next 3-4 years.

Resolved: That the verbal update be noted and Michael Hyatt thanked for his update.

6. Levelling up and devolution - member updates

6.1 To receive and discuss round robin updates from committee members on levelling up, devolution and county deals in their areas

The head of policy and communications provided a short update on the national scene with regard to devolution and levelling up since the previous committee session. A white paper was likely before the end of the calendar year. Counties were in the driving seat by being able to frame their own county deals with government. Newport Pagnell Town Council was now doing more in the devolutionary sense than ever before. There was agreement that the government should level up in the public, not just the private sector.

Resolved: That the verbal update be noted.

7. Committee elections 2021

7.1 To receive a short verbal update from the Administration Manager highlighting the process and main deadlines for direct elections (Super Council, elected clerks, directly elected councillors) and National Assembly elections to this committee for 2021

The Administration Manager provided a helpful succinct summary of the direct and National Assembly elections to the committee for which the nomination period had commenced. All results would be announced and known by National Assembly on 8 December 2021. A mailing would be issued the next day. The entire committee was now up for election. The tenure was January 2022 - December 2023.

There was no time at the end of the session for a discussion on new national networks or a review of the last two years as the meeting over-ran.

Resolved: That the verbal update be noted.

8. Date and time of next meeting

To note that the next meeting of the Larger Councils Committee will take place likely by Zoom on a date yet to be determined in January 2022.

Councillor Paul Harvey,
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