

LARGER COUNCILS COMMITTEE | DRAFT MINUTES

Zoom meeting of the Larger Councils Committee on 22 February 2022 at 11.00

Present:

Councillors Peter Astell (committee vice-chair, for part), Mike Drew (NALC vice-chair, member services), Paul Harvey (committee chair), Mathew Hulbert and Richard Parry; and directly elected clerks Jane Biscombe, Jennifer Childs, Carl Hearn and Shar Roselman.

Staff present: Chris Borg (policy manager), Justin Griggs (head of policy and communications) and Jonathan Owen (chief executive).

1. Welcome and apologies

1.1 The committee chair welcomed everyone to the session.

Resolved: That the welcome be noted.

1.2 To receive any apologies

Resolved: That apologies be noted from Cllr. Dave Barton.

2. Minutes and matters arising from previous committee Zoom call on 15 December 2021

2.1 The committee chair asked the committee if there were any matters arising from the minutes of the 15 December 2021 governance session and they were none.

Resolved: That the minutes from the 15 December 2021 committee session be noted.

2.2 Action log – the committee chair asked the committee if there were any observations on the committee’s action log compiled since the 15 December 2021 session – there were none.

Resolved: That the committee’s action log from the period 15 December 2021 – present be noted.

3. National stakeholder update

3.1 Mark Davies from CCLA provided the committee with the usual excellent update on the work being undertaken in the previous quarter by CCLA. CCLA had just undertaken a governance review as a result of which the NALC chair now had an observer seat at the LAMIT council. CCLA were offering a 0.3458% return on their products at present – a huge achievement in the current financial climate. The fortunes of CCLA continued to look positive as it continued to collect rents. A retail park in Maidenhead had just been purchased. The charity sector was taking a financial hit on equity and CCLA had also sold a couple of office spaces recently.

Resolved: That Mark Davies and CCLA be thanked for the excellent update and that the next session of the committee take place on 10 May 2022 at the CCLA London offices.

4. Introductions and committee work priorities 2022

4.1 Introductions from incoming committee members not at 15 December committee governance session

Jennifer Childs, incoming elected clerk to the committee, introduced herself to the committee as she had been unable to attend the 15 December 2021 committee governance session.

Resolved: That the committee welcomes Jennifer Childs to the committee.

4.2 To develop and expand the committee's work programme 2022

The policy manager provided a verbal update regarding the committee's work programme for 2022. It was linked to the committee's terms of reference and the NALC strategic plan.

There was then a general discussion regarding NALC services to the largest (Super) Councils. There had been some recent unhappiness amongst some Super Councils regarding clarity of the NALC provision for them and what this service (amongst constricted staff resource) constituted. There had been very few networking opportunities for Super Councils in 2021, and a few online in 2020. There would be four networking sessions online for Super Councils in 2022. Communications between NALC, county associations and Super Councils needed to vastly improve in 2022, but once this was achieved it was hoped the situation could stabilise consistently.

Resolved: That the strategic objectives from the work programme also link to NALC's work on levelling up; that the committee be updated on the current number of Direct Access councils; that councillors become more involved in networking sessions of the Super Councils Network; and that NALC share good practice amongst Super Councils having regard to the unique selling points of Super Councils.

5. Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman Update

The committee chair introduced a discussion about the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO), following an update from the head of policy and communications. Mick King, the LGSCO had spoken at the NALC Future Communities conference on 2 December 2021, the same as the LGSCO Triennial Review had been launched. NALC had responded to the review agreeing that there should be a pilot of larger councils over coming years with coverage by the LGSCO ahead of any full rollout to local councils. The LGSCO was currently awaiting any response to the publication of its review, from the government.

Resolved: That anyone from the committee interested in helping NALC with any of its future piloting work (as part of a sounding board grouping) regarding larger councils and the LGSCO should contact relevant NALC officers as appropriate.

6. Super Councils Network updates

6.1 LGA associate membership option for Super Councils

The policy manager provided a brief verbal update stating that there were currently 70 Super Councils, 4 of whom had taken out the option of LGA associate membership for the 2022-23 financial year. No SCN councils had taken out this option during the 2021-22 financial year. There was a brief discussion about the process for forming the Network every year and it was confirmed that if county associations notified NALC of councils in their areas at anytime during the financial year who otherwise qualified for membership of SCN, those councils could join the Network real-time.

Resolved: That local councils confirmed to NALC by county associations to otherwise qualify for network status at anytime during a financial year – be added onto the network.

6.2 Update on National Cyber Security Centre local government pilot

The policy manager provided a brief verbal update that there were three Super Councils who had joined the National Cyber Security Centre local government pilot so far (Farnham Town Council, Newport Pagnell Town Council and Sevenoaks Town Council). NALC had also joined the pilot, corporately. The committee would be kept updated.

Resolved: That the report be noted.

6.3. Peer challenge

The committee chair introduced a brief discussion on peer challenge which it was hoped would re-commence (subject to the COVID-19 situation improving) – in the Autumn. Other NALC officers were engaging with Cirencester Town Council on potential interest for a peer review. Future peer reviews would likely need to take place at Super Councils which had achieved Quality Gold status.

Resolved: That the verbal update be noted.

7. Levelling up and devolution - member updates

The committee chair introduced a round-robin item on levelling up and local councils. The need to improve communication between NALC and county associations needed to be picked up in the NALC governance review. After a short further update from the policy manager, members provided the following local updates on devolution and levelling up in their own areas:

- There was a belief from Newport Pagnell that borough councils do not understand the levelling up agenda;
- In Newbury the levelling up agenda was considered to be political and residents were not receiving the services they deserved;
- It was noted that there were only two references in the levelling up white paper to local councils;
- In Weymouth the town council cannot make an impact on the deprivation agenda as its area is not considered deprived enough; waste bins are disappearing in the town and there is a case of service dumping, also;
- In Devon there is the Team Devon model, but regarding the combined authority approach it is hard for local councils to make an impact;

- In Yate it was recognised that local council services had to be very local; for this reason the council had adopted youth services for the area.

Resolved: That the verbal updates be noted.

8. National Assembly vacancies on the committee

The chief executive confirmed that there was no need for additional co-options to a committee this size. However there would be a proper central process communicated by NALC over coming weeks regarding filling all National Assembly vacancies on all committees, including this one

Resolved: That the verbal update be noted.

9. National networks

The head of policy and communications provided a short verbal update on the rationale behind the creation over the last year of several new national networks. There was then a broader discussion during which it was agreed that a balance was needed between sharing good practice and available resource. The networks were also an attempt by NALC to reach out directly to local councillors, councils and the wider sector, also on thematic issues.

Resolved: That the verbal update be noted.

10. Date and time of next meeting

11:00 – 13:00, 10 May 2022 at CCLA’s London Offices, Senator House, 85 Queen Victoria Street, London, EC4V 4ET.

Councillor Paul Harvey
chair