

## **LARGER COUNCILS COMMITTEE | DRAFT MINUTES**

Hybrid meeting of the Larger Councils Committee on 10 May 2022 at 11.00 taking place by Zoom from CCLA, Senator House, 85 Queen Victoria Street, EC4V 4ET.

### **Present (physically or online):**

Councillors Pat Ansell, Phil Barnett, Mike Drew (NALC vice-chair, member services), Paul Harvey (committee chair), Mathew Hulbert, Richard Parry and Peter Quinn (for part); and directly elected clerks Jane Biscombe, Carl Hearn, Shar Roselman and Mark Smith (for part).

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

Also present from CCLA – Kelly Watson, CCLA Relationship Manager

### **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 Cllrs. Dave Barton and Isabella Roberts.

### **2. Minutes and matters arising from previous committee meeting on 22 February 2022**

2.1 The committee chair asked the committee if there were any matters arising from the minutes of the 22 February 2022 session and Cllr Parry confirmed that there was a spelling error on page 2 of the previous minutes and that the acronym for LAMIT required qualification on the same page.

**Resolved:** That the minutes from the 22 February 2022 committee session be noted as amended.

2.2 Action log – the committee chair asked the committee if there were any observations on the committee's action log compiled since the 22 February 2022 session – there were none.

**Resolved:** That the committee's action log from the period 22 February 2022 – present be noted and that NALC be asked to prioritise ongoing engagement and support to the Super Councils Network in 2022.

### **3. National stakeholder update**

3.1 Kelly Watson from CCLA provided the committee with an excellent and very helpful update. CCLA had been working recently on mental health corporate benchmarking amongst large corporate FTSE 100 organisations. Headline information on retail and investment funds was provided in summary. There had been some recent volatility caused by the war in Ukraine, reinforcing the notion that geo-politics were key here. A very helpful CCLA inflation briefing would also be circulated with the minutes to this session.

**Resolved:** That Kelly Watson of CCLA be thanked for the excellent update and inflation briefing.

### **4. Committee work priorities 2022**

4.1 To receive an update on the committee work programme for 2022 and to discuss

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 wider discussion in which it was confirmed that no one had heard of any recent examples of larger councils having major cyber security scares. It was noted that there would likely soon be a move to ask local (parish and town) councils to transition to .gov.uk domains.

A general national increase in insurance premiums was discussed which some larger councils had raised. However it was agreed that such increases were across the different types of insurance policy and spread across England.

**Resolved:** That NALC officers research and plan in a 24-hour physical study visit for the 2023-24 financial year de-coupled from a committee meeting, open to 12 paying delegates, factoring in a single delegate rate, an evening meal, overnight accommodation, and lunch on both days, as well as presentations in the town council chamber and a physical study tour – at Newport Pagnell Town Council (in Buckinghamshire).

## 5. Super Councils Network updates

5.1 To receive a short written report from the policy manager on the number of Super Councils taking up the national cyber security pilot from the National Cyber Security Centre (NCSC) and to receive a general update from participating council representatives.

The policy manager provided an update on the three Super Councils which had taken part in the NCSC pilot on cyber security. No one had reported negative experiences of the pilot and two of the councils were attending the session and said it worked well, providing necessary reassurance. Participation in the pilot was also included in the Micro-shade deal which some local councils had taken out.

**Resolved:** That the written report be noted and that Nik W. from NCSC be asked to provide a further update on the pilot at the next committee session.

(b) To receive a short written report from Member Services on peer challenge

The policy manager provided a short update on a paper provided by Member Services on peer challenge. The LGA had agreed to fund two such peer challenge visits per year. Super Councils achieving Quality Gold were the pool for these peer challenges. Cirencester Town Council had been approached. LCAS was also a form of peer review, it was agreed.

Resolved: That the written report be noted.

## 6. Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman

6.1 To receive a verbal update from the head of policy and communications on the recent (4 May) NALC meeting with the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman and consider next steps

The head of policy and communications provided a brief update on a meeting held with DLUHC and the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO) recently regarding a potential pilot of larger council coverage under the auspices of the LGSCO. It has long been the policy of NALC that the ombudsman should eventually cover all local councils.

There was a brief discussion during which it was agreed that the natural piloting cut would likely be larger / SCN councils for any such pilot. A working group would need to be framed. It was also noted that in Wales all community (local) councils fell under the ambit of the equivalent ombudsman.

**Resolved:** That the verbal update be noted and that committee members should e-mail the policy manager brief headlines of complaints their councils have had to field over the last two years stating length of time considered, action taken and subject of complaint / outcome.

## **7. Levelling up and devolution - member updates**

7.1 To receive and discuss round robin updates from committee members on levelling up, devolution and county deals in their areas in the light of the publication of the Levelling Up White Paper

The head of policy and communications provided a helpful update on the national picture for local councils regarding levelling up and devolution. Good practice is key. There was no timetable as yet for growth funds. More support for local councils is essential. The Infrastructure Levy could also be key.

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

## **8. National Assembly vacancies on the committee**

8.1 To receive a verbal update from the Executive Officer on any new committee members recruited from the corporate process for filling National Assembly vacancies for the 2022-23 tenure to this committee.

The committee chair confirmed that Cllr Ansell had filled the available National Assembly vacancy to the committee and welcomed Cllr Ansell again to the session.

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

## 9. National networks

9.1 To receive a short verbal update on the various new national networks which have been created by NALC including what issues the committee would like to have raised in the upcoming Super Councils Network session on 17 May 2022.

The policy manager provided a short verbal update on the Climate Emergency Network and the Super Councils Network online sessions taking place around this time. The head of policy and communications updated the committee on upcoming and recent sessions of the LGBT+, Youth and Women's networks.

The networks required ongoing promotion and engagement by county associations and NALC, but were an excellent way of sharing good practice.

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

## 10. Funding simplification

The head of policy and communications introduced four Department of Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) officials with whom he had recently met regarding the changes required to the current funding structure for local councils. All four officials kindly joined the call remotely.

A short presentation was screen shared during which the reduction of reporting burdens and understanding local authorities were regarded as being key for the government. The committee then fed back concerns that during COVID-19 lockdowns many larger councils could not access government funding; many principal authorities did not want to share / cascade such funding to local councils and many larger councils are still worried about council tax referendum principles.

Direct funding of local councils remains a key priority for the sector; funding timescales are key; local council support for project delivery is essential; and the 2012-13 experience of Localisation of Council Tax Support was also cited.

**Resolved:** That the four DLUHC officials be thanked for their attendance; and that the policy manager issue the 6 funding questions from DLUHC to the committee, collate and feed-back responses to NALC senior management soonest.

## 11. Date and time of next meeting

11:00 – 13:00, 26 July 2022 by Zoom conference call.

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Councillor Paul Harvey chair©  
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