

LARGER COUNCILS COMMITTEE | DRAFT MINUTES

Quarterly Zoom meeting of the Larger Councils Committee on 26 July 2022 at 11.00 taking place by Zoom.

Present (online):

Councillors Pat Ansell, Peter Astell (committee vice chair), Phil Barnett, Mike Drew (NALC vice-chair, member services), Paul Harvey (committee chair), Peter Quinn; 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).

Also present from BHIB - Julie Walker and Kevin Richards; and CCLA - Kelly Watson, CCLA.

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 Richard Parry and Matthew Hulbert, and Jennifer Childs.

2. Minutes and matters arising from previous committee hybrid session on 10 May 2022

2.1 Minutes - The committee chair asked if there were any amendments to be made to the minutes from the 10 May 2022 committee session and there were not.

Resolved: That the minutes from the 10 May 2022 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 10 May 2022 session - there were none.

Resolved: That the committee's action log from the period 10 May 2022 – present be noted.

2.3 Empowering Communities hybrid conference - since it was not listed elsewhere the agenda the policy manager provided a short verbal update urging committee members to book onto the NALC Empowering Communities hybrid conference on 7 November 2022 and to urge larger councils in their own areas to do the same.

Resolved: That committee members promote the NALC Empowering Communities hybrid conference on 7 November 2022 to larger councils in their areas.

2.4 Larger council study visit 2023 – the policy manager also provided a short verbal update on development of the larger council study visit 2023 to Newport Pagnell Town Council on 27-28 June 2022. NALC officer had met with the clerk of Newport Pagnell Town Council recently who had been confirmed as the venue for the event. The policy manager was seeking quotes from hotel venues currently as well as framing an event budget and would be meeting with the clerk of Newport Pagnell Town Council again in August. The committee would be kept updated.

Resolved: That the verbal update be noted.

3. National stakeholder update

3.1 Julie Walker and Kevin Richards from BHIB provided the committee with an excellent and very helpful update. BHIB confirmed they did not insure with principal local authorities. It was confirmed that many larger councils had taken on devolved and new services, so it was important that such councils informed their insurers about new risk. Value for money, labour and materials all have to be factored into framing suitable policies for larger councils. Many insurance policies are index linked. Low-cost business often leads to a hard market. This in turn can lead to increased premiums.

Resolved: That Julie Walker and Kevin Richards of BHIB be thanked for the excellent update and any referral requests from committee members be relayed onto BHIB.

4. Cyber security pilot update

A member of the National Cyber Security Centre (NCSC) came and gave an update on current cyber security issues.

Resolved: That the NCSC update be noted.

There was then a ten-minute break between 11:58 a.m. and 12:10 p.m.

5. Neighbourhood governance review [Levelling Up White Paper]

There was then a short introduction on the neighbourhood governance review provision in the 2021 government Levelling Up the United Kingdom White Paper, from the head of policy and communications. The main related NALC positions were making it easier for new local councils to be set up, and holding principal authorities to account when they do not apply a presumption in favour of creating such councils.

There was then a wider discussion during which it was confirmed that Milton Keynes Council had confirmed there was no levelling up funding to be shared with parishes, whereas discussions were happening in Buckinghamshire. It was agreed that youth services, children's services and education were ripe for levelling up. Smaller councils were considered key to this agenda and larger councils had a key role to play in involving their surrounding smaller councils during Community Governance Reviews (CGRs). In Wycombe it was important to prevent the principal authority from blocking the creation of new local councils. In Newbury the Business Improvement District (BID) had been dictating to the town council what development should happen where.

Resolved: That the verbal update be noted and that the committee views be fed into the upcoming special Policy Committee session on the same subject.

6. Cost of living crisis - member updates

The committee chairman updated the committee on local initiatives his council were taking regarding community fridges - and said that many larger councils were doing likewise with limited funding. What else could larger councils do? Chippenham Town Council were letting charities in the town proceed with the work of supporting residents affected by the cost of living crisis.

Resolved: That the verbal update be noted.

7. Funding campaign

7.1 To receive a short slide deck presentation showing early findings from the Funding Task and Finish Group's recent survey on direct funding

The policy manager spoke to some slides recently shared with Policy Committee summarising findings from the finance survey recently completed. 881 responses had been received. The majority of respondents had agreed that local councils should be able to apply to central agencies for funding and backed NALC lobbying on the subject. The Funding Task and Finish Group would be meeting in August to agree where evidence gaps were and how to fill them ahead of the 19 October 2022 Policy Committee session. The committee would be kept updated.

Resolved: That the slides be noted.

7.2 To encourage a broader future finance survey response rate from Super Councils.

The policy manager and the head of policy and communications briefed the committee that in the recent finance survey less than half of Super Councils (the prime potential recipients in future of direct funding) had responded to the survey. Super councils were urged to respond to future such surveys if NALC's case for direct funding was to have any credibility.

Resolved: That the verbal update be noted.

7.3 To discuss the government's recent suggestion that local government finance settlements should be every two years (and the associated implications for larger councils)

The policy manager briefly reminded the committee that the government had recently suggested that in future local government finance settlements take place every two years and not annually. The committee would be kept updated.

Resolved: That the verbal update be noted.

8. National networks

8.1 To receive a short written report on the various new national networks which have been created by NALC including issues raised at recent Super Councils Network sessions ahead of the next Zoom call on 14 September 2022.

The committee chair and the policy manager provided a short verbal update on national network sessions which had taken place since the previous committee session on 10 May. There was due to be a Super Councils Network session between Noon and 13:15 on 14 September which committee members from Super Councils were welcome to attend.

9. Date and time of next meeting

11:00 – 13:00, 18 October 2022 by Zoom conference call.

Councillor Paul Harvey chair
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