

## LARGER COUNCILS COMMITTEE | DRAFT MINUTES

Meeting of the Larger Councils Committee on 28 February 2023 at 10.00 taking place by Zoom.

### **Present (online):**

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

Staff present: Chris Borg (policy manager) and Justin Griggs (head of policy and communications).

### **1. Apologies**

**Resolved:** That apologies be noted from Mark Smith and Cllr Peter Astell (committee vice chair).

### **2. Minutes of previous meeting – 18 October 2022**

**Resolved:** That the minutes from the 18 October 2022 committee session be noted.

### **3. Mandatory training**

The policy manager provided a brief verbal update that the Policy Committee had agreed to review its training policy for councillors which currently stated that training should be strongly encouraged and not made mandatory. The policy manager had attended all committee and network sessions this cycle to draw down the views of each forum as to whether training should be made mandatory for all councillors or not. There was a brief debate and then a vote took place during which it was agreed that training should not be made mandatory for all councillors. Further sub-questions were asked and answers logged which would be fed back to the Policy Committee in due course.

**Resolved:** That training should be strongly encouraged for all councillors, that county associations should be encouraged to roll out training for all newly elected councillors, that training checklists should be factored into the Annual Governance and Accountability Return (AGAR) and to the Local Council Award

Scheme as appropriate, but that training be mandatory for all councillors on standards of behaviour, good governance and best practice.

#### **4. National Agreement on Salaries and Conditions of Service of Local Council Clerks in England and Wales**

There was a discussion on the National Agreement on Salaries and Conditions of Service of Local Council Clerks in England and Wales during which the point was made that the minimum pay scale for the highest and lowest scale of clerks should be increased as the current agreement was not fit for purpose. An example was provided of a clerk's job for a very large council with a population of over 50,000 people where the salary was completely inadequate.

Securing an agreement for all 10,000 local councils to use was considered very difficult. Clerks are paid too little on smaller councils. Job evaluations need to be effective and fair.

**Resolved:** That the National Agreement on Salaries and Conditions of Service of Local Council Clerks in England and Wales be referred to the next meetings of the Smaller Councils Committee and Management Board for discussion.

#### **5. Civility and respect project**

Linda Larter, the chief executive of Sevenoaks Town Council provided a very thorough presentation on the civility and respect project. The project factored in a sliding scale of 5 types of local council based on need. Training, support and intervention were factored in. The scale runs from stable to critical impact. The project aims to keep councils at a stable level. There are also 6 workstreams. Not all clerks are trained. Interventions where needed should be at an early stage. Monitoring Officers have also said they need resilience training too. Lack of trust is a big issue.

Some councils involve the clerk being central to activity far more than others. 1021 councils so far have signed the civility pledge. Local councillors are encouraged to continue to engage with training with good governance arrangements in place for all local councils being the aim of the project.

**Resolved:** To thank Linda Larter for her excellent presentation, to welcome the fact that 1021 local councils have signed the civility pledge and for all committee members to encourage their own larger councils to engage with the project.

There was then a ten-minute comfort break between 11:05 a.m. and 11:15 a.m.

## **6. Leader and Cabinet model of governance**

The policy manager introduced an item on the leader model of governance following a query from Hebden Royd Town Council in Yorkshire. The council had asked for updates on what the larger councils of committee members had for governance models on their councils. The committee chair started a round robin update of committee members whose feedback was as below:

- Yate Town Council – has a leader, but also a civic Mayor.
- Chippenham Town Council is thought to have excellent and very clear standing orders regarding its governance arrangements.
- Weymouth Town Council is a new larger council so does not have the longevity issue of the longest serving councillor becoming mayor. The council has a leader and the council is not an advocate of the cabinet structure.
- Newbury Town Council has a party grouping system where the council leader is also the leader of the largest party. A committee structure is also run there, where the Mayor runs full council meetings.
- Woughton Community Council have a Mayoral Ambassador and a chair of council, where the longest serving member becomes chair.

The discussion continued and it was confirmed that NALC's position was to lobby for the position of leader on local councils which wanted a leader, to not be unlawful. It was agreed there was a need for legal clarity.

**Resolved:** That the written report be noted and that the feedback on governance models be relayed to Hebden Royd Town Council.

## **7. Sharing good practice**

### 7.1 Update on NALC good practice visit to Newport Pagnell Town Council on 27/28 June 2023

The policy manager provided a brief update on progress with organisation of the [good practice visit to Newport Pagnell Town Council on 27-28 June 2023](#). There were currently low numbers of bookings to the event which had taken much work for officers at NALC and Newport Pagnell Town Council to organise since May 2022. This was considered to be part of a wider trend of falling delegate numbers to NALC's physical events due to train strikes, COVID-19 and the sector preference for online events indicated by NALC survey results over the last 3 years.

Committee members were encouraged to book onto the event and to promote the event to all local councils in their areas. Depending on outcomes of NALC engagement with the host hotel, the event would either have to be cancelled or delivered as a one-off with fewer delegate numbers. The event model was not considered to be sustainable beyond 2023.

**Resolved:** That committee members be encouraged to book on to the good practice visit 2023 to Newport Pagnell Town Council and to promote it to all local councils in their areas and that the event either be cancelled outright or delivered as a one-off with fewer delegates for 2023 only.

#### 7.2 Weymouth Town Council hosted study visit for Northamptonshire councils

The policy manager confirmed (in the absence of the clerk to Weymouth Town Council who had had to leave the meeting due to a prior engagement) that Weymouth Town Council had recently hosted a good practice visit of three larger councils from Northamptonshire which had gone very well.

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

### 8. Provisional local government finance settlement 2023-24

8.1 The policy manager confirmed that NALC had recently responded to the government's technical consultation on the provisional local government finance settlement 2023-24. NALC had welcomed the fact that the government would be again exempting all local councils from referenda on excessive council tax increases, but argued for a permanent or multi-year exemption in future.

**Resolved:** That the report be noted.

### 9. NALC National Networks

9.1 The policy manager provided a short verbal update on the recent meetings of the Climate Emergency Network and the Super Councils Network sessions he had chaired, summarising outcomes. The two most readily available notes from sessions had been included in the committee papers.

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

## **10. LGA associate membership**

10.1 The policy manager provided a short report on the latest state of play with LGA associate membership for the 2022-23 and 2023-24 financial years. Five Super Councils had taken this membership out in 2022-23. Seven Super Councils were taking it out in 2023-24.

**Resolved:** That the report be noted.

## **11. Date and time of next meeting**

10:00 a.m. – Noon, 18 May 2023 by Zoom.

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Councillor Paul Harvey chair  
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