

LARGER COUNCILS WORKSHOP | DRAFT NOTES

Workshop of the Larger Councils Committee on 25 July 2023 at 11.00 taking place at CCLA, 1 Angel Lane, London, EC4R 3AB.

Present:

Councillors Pat Ansell, Phil Barnett, Mike Drew (NALC vice-chair, member services), Paul Harvey (committee chair), Katharine Keats Rohan and Keith Stevens (NALC chair); and directly elected clerks, Carl Hearn and Shar Roselman.

Staff present: Chris Borg (policy manager), Justin Griggs (head of policy and communications), Charlotte Eisenhart (head of member services) and Farhana Miah (executive officer, for part).

Others in attendance: Mark Davies, relationship manager at CCLA

1. Apologies

Resolved: That apologies be noted from Mark Smith and Jane Biscombe and Cllrs Peter Astell (committee vice chair), Isabella Roberts, and Peter Quinn.

2. Welcome and introductions

The committee chair welcomed everyone to the session, thanked them for attending the first committee session with an in-person element since May 2022 and thanked CCLA for hosting. The committee would need a new chair from January 2024 as the current chair's tenure would be running out in December 2023. Due to train delays a revised programme for the session had had to be issued to have the least impact on item timings.

Resolved: That the welcome be noted.

3. Sharing good practice (plenary)

3.1 2023 Study tour Newport Pagnell Town Council including reflections, outcomes and lessons for the town council plus next year's tour (slides by Chris Borg, NALC policy manager and Shar Roselman, clerk at Newport Pagnell Town Council)

Shar Roselman presented some slides on the recently delivered NALC study visit 2023 to Newport Pagnell. The visit, it was felt, had proceeded smoothly and it had proven a sustainable model as an in-person event either side of COVID. It had

been the first study visit NALC delivered since 2019 and was now the only in-person event NALC delivered. The visit had included presentations from town council staff and the mayor, an evening meal and a bus tour of devolved leisure services, and had almost sold out. It was urged that there be flexibility with some aspects of future study visits, that costs be minimised, and that administration be kept minimal.

Resolved: That Shar Roselman and Newport Pagnell Town Council be thanked for hosting the study visit 2023.

3.2 2024 Study tour to Yate Town Council including initial proposals and lessons from this year (slides by Chris Borg, NALC policy manager and Cllr Mike Drew, NALC vice chair, Member Services).

Cllr Mike Drew spoke to slides summarising the planned study visit to Yate Town Council on 21-22 May 2024, theme youth engagement. The dates required urgent confirmation as there was less time to organise the session this year. An inception project session had taken place. Hotel quotes were being sought. The event would feature a day 1 bus tour, an evening meal at the town council offices (locally sourced), and presentations on day 2. The event would launch in the Autumn.

Resolved: That the verbal update be noted.

4. Getting more people involved (breakout session)

The committee chair then broke the session up into groups who discussed how to get more people involved in the work of the committee, and to retain involvement. Groups then returned and feedback in answer to the below questions was given:

(a) Is the committee effective?

- Committee size has to be borne in mind.
- Some committee members are regular non-attendees.
- Committee members have to be clear about expectations.
- NALC should widely promote the committee elections in 2023.
- Party politics must not play a part in the work of the committee.
- There was one view that the size of the committee should be increased.

(b) What is working well and less well?

- It is becoming harder to recruit active people to the committee.
- There was a need to involve younger councillors on the committee where possible.
- It is not always easy to get onto the committee.
- The committee must not be political.
- Larger councils often have tense relationships with their principal authorities, but larger council groupings across county areas work well.

© How can we encourage more people to get involved?

- It was suggested that the membership of the committee should be wider.
- It was also important that the role of the committee was understood.
- The notion of regional larger council champions was also suggested.

(d) What is the answer to the question: you should stand for election to the Larger Councils Committee because....?....and what's in it for you/what you get back, is....?

- You should stand for larger councils committee because:
 - would find it useful in your role as a councillor.
 - would like to represent members to NALC/committee.
 - would like to make a change nationally/locally.
 - want fairness in how councils work, better performing councils and councillors. Share how councils can do well and help their communities.

-There was a view that most larger councils know what their county association does but were unclear about what NALC does.

Resolved: That the feedback from the workshop be fed back into NALC, that the dates for the NALC committee elections (direct and via National Assembly) 2023 be circulated with the notes of the session, and that the committee elections be widely promoted to end 2023.

5. Member services session (plenary)

Charlotte Eisenhart, head of member services provided a short, well received update on Member Services:

- the policy of giving 1 year's free membership to a council which was about to leave membership was working well.
- a small delegation had just visited Weston-super-Mare Town Council and was hopeful that it would soon rejoin membership of the associations.
- audit and finance service provision was being tightened.
- how-to guides were being developed.
- a new website would be live hopefully by end 2023.
- there would likely be a review soon of the Direct Access Scheme.
- members were asked to sign up to the Civility and Respect pledge.

Resolved: That the verbal update be noted.

6. Neighbourhood governance review

The committee chair again split the committee into small breakout groups to discuss the impending neighbourhood governance review from the Levelling Up The United Kingdom white paper. Feedback is as below to the questions set:

- **What should the function and powers of local councils be?**
 - Government needs to recognise that larger councils provide much more than the smaller councils and often provide (and pay) for services used by the residents of the surrounding small parishes.
 - Larger councils need to be able to access funds provided by government but recognise that civil servants may not be able to cope with the number of bids if all parishes could bid. So NALC/county associations should have a role in distributing dedicated fund(s). NALC would have to be paid to resource such work.
- **What powers do you need?**
 - NALC should be expected to collect data on the sector to be able to spot issues which are likely to lead to potential failure. It would need

to be collected by county associations and fed to NALC for collation and both will need to be resourced by government.

- Parish boundary reviews need to be removed from the district/unitary councils which often have preconceived attitudes such as Milton Keynes which has a fixed limit of 5,000 houses for a parish. Reviews are often done too late for the PC having involvement with new developments. Particularly where development do not fit within existing boundaries of the parish/town that they will be practically part of.
- **What funding do you need?**
 - Again NALC should be paid for the responsibility of conducting speeded up reviews.
 - To produce more robust communities the parish councils need to be up skilled and the only way to do this is by better resourced county associations / NALC.
- **What support do you need?**
 - There appears to be ignorance that the parish sector does not receive funding such as the LGA receives. So government must provide funding to NALC / county associations to support its local councils. We need to remind government that local councils used to get a share of the local business rate. It would not be noticed to give say 0.5% of the National Non Domestic Rate to NALC.

Resolved: That the feedback be incorporated into any NALC response to the impending neighbourhood governance review.

7. Martyn's Law (plenary)

The head of policy and communications provided a short overview of NALC's recent engagement with the Home Office over Martyn's Law. NALC had recently liaised with SLCC on this issue and had responded to a Home Affairs Select Committee inquiry on the matter.

Helen Ball, clerk to Shrewsbury Town Council then provided an excellent in-depth presentation as to what constituted Martyn's Law and what would be required of

local councils if the relevant bill was enacted by government. The main points are as below:

- This would have the biggest impact on the sector since GDPR.
- This followed the tragedy of the Manchester Arena bombing in 2017.
- The law if enacted would impact all local councils.
- There is a moral imperative to this.
- The government and its agencies had already produced guidance.
- Much good practice is already being done by local councils.

Resolved: That the slides be circulated with the session notes, that Helen Ball be thanked for the excellent presentation, and that NALC continue to promote Martyn's Law, engaging with SLCC and the Home Office.

8. Date and time of next meeting

10:00 a.m. – Noon, Tuesday 31 October 2023 by Zoom.

Councillor Paul Harvey chair
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