

LARGER COUNCILS COMMITTEE | DRAFT MINUTES

Meeting of the Larger Councils Committee on 31 October 2023 at 10.00 taking place by Zoom.

Present (online):

Councillors Peter Astell (committee vice chair), Phil Barnett, Paul Harvey (committee chair), Katharine Keats Rohan (for part); and directly elected clerks, Carl Hearn and Shar Roselman (for part).

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

Other guests in attendance: Charlotte Lewis and Natalie Turner (Centre for Ageing Better) (for part).

1. Centre for Ageing Better

The committee received a presentation from Charlotte Lewis of the Centre for Ageing Better. The slides summarised the work the Centre was undertaking, working with principal authorities and others, to identify the needs of the ageing population, where help is needed and what type of support is most required. The Centre has most recently met with NALC and there was a wish to work more closely with larger local councils; this was supported by the Committee.

Resolved: That Natalie Turner and Charlotte Lewis be thanked for their presentation and the slides circulated with the notes of the session; that NALC continue to work with Centre for Ageing Better in the future such as through encouraging larger councils to sign up to the World Health Organisation framework and to become age friendly areas, and on engagement with the NALC National Network: Super councils.

2. Apologies

Apologies were received from Cllr Mike Drew (NALC vice chair member services) and Jane Biscombe.

Resolved: That the apologies be noted.

3. Minutes and notes of previous meetings

Resolved: That the draft minutes from the formal committee session of 18 May 2023 be noted, and full notes of the informal committee workshop of 25 July 2023 be noted.

4. Review of committee workshop on 25 July 2023

The Policy Manager summarised the full set of workshop notes including group discussions. There was a general discussion in which several issues were highlighted.

Member commitment to the committee was a concern it had been noted that the attendance from committee members for the meeting was poor, as it had been on other occasions. It was noted there were 6 vacancies to the committee due largely to the council elections on 4 May 2023. The creation of the Super Councils Network was identified as only a minor contributory factor.

The Committee reiterated its expectation that a new committee intake would see greater commitment from committee members for the 2024-25 tenure and it should consider how to ensure it can function more effectively. This should include a review the committee's terms of reference and current definition of larger councils as those with an annual budgeted precept or turnover of greater than £600,000 per year.

It was also noted that the government's proposed review of neighbourhood governance would be now take the form of a much narrower piece of work to include an update to guidance on community governance reviews and change to parish polls regulations to be complete by Summer 2024.

Resolved: That NALC work with the Committee to ensure better attendance at committee meetings, more effective functioning of the Committee and to consider the definition of a larger council.

There was a short comfort break from 11:05 to 11:15.

5. Member services update

The head of member services provided an update on the work undertaken on workforce and employment issues recently. The committee identified guidance for managing outdoor workers, and an updated job evaluation scheme would be of particular interest and impact for larger councils, and it was agreed that would be factored into the workplan for 2023.

Resolved: That the written report and verbal update be noted.

The member services manager provided an overview of the NALC/Local Government Association (LGA) corporate peer challenge programme. In recent years a peer challenge team had visited Falmouth, Chippenham, Cirencester, and Morecambe town councils, where visits are usually for two days, and eligible for Super Councils only. The LGA has now increased its support to five corporate peer challenges in this financial year with the aim of continuing this number in future years, budget permitting. The committee fed back that sharing of documents and the learning from these activities would be very useful in terms of sharing good practice.

Resolved: That the verbal update be noted.

6. Policy positions update

The policy manager gave a short verbal update on NALC's recent responses to government consultations on local plan making, permitted development rights and hedgerows which were available on the NALC website.

Resolved: That the verbal update be noted.

The Policy Manager reported that the Committee's previous decision on NALC's approach to working with the Society of Local Council Clerks on Martyn's Law, included the creation of a small steering group. This would comprise officers from NALC and SLCC plus a representative of Policy Committee, Larger Councils Committee, Smaller Councils Committee, and a county officer. The purpose of the group would be help inform and steer our engagement and advocacy with the Government and Parliament on the legislation and the development of advice, guidance, and other support for councils.

Resolved: That Shar Roselman act as the committee's representative on the new Martyn's Law steering group, with the current committee chair as a fallback.

The Policy Manager outlined work underway by the Policy Committee to explore the development of a new threshold for triggering by-elections at local councils and reform to parish polls. He added that NALC's National Network: Super councils and the committee had inputted to date and a proposal would be considered by the Policy Committee in January 2024. Parish polls had been discussed at the most recent NALC National Network: Super councils and our current position had been added to the NALC policy register and would be the basis for our engagement with the government on this issue.

Resolved: That the update be noted.

7. Associate membership of the Local Government Association

The Policy manager set out the status of the NALC offer to Super Councils for associate membership of the LGA. He also explained the process and current levels through NALC of LGA associate membership, currently at its highest total of 8 excluding during its piloting.

Resolved: That the verbal update and written report be noted.

8. NALC National Networks

The policy manager provided a summary of the recent meetings of the NALC's national networks on the Climate Emergency Network and Super Councils, adding that dates for 2024/25 were currently being developed.

Resolved: That the verbal update be noted.

9. Review of 2022-23 committee tenure

The committee chair invited all attending committee members to share their experiences of being on the committee over the last 2 years. Feedback was broadly positive and suggestions for improvement included the need for the committee to have a mission statement, the committee being expanded as a way of engaging with more councils, NALC should keep under review organising a dedicated event for larger councils, the study tour was a good way to bring councils together and should be retained, encouraging regional groupings of

county associations to work together to arrange their own larger council events and conferences, sharing good practice was identified as being particularly relevant and ways to enhance this explored, and the committee should continue to support piloting of an extension to the remit Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman, and the retention of in person committee workshop each year.

10. Date and time of next meeting

Thursday 14 December 2023 from 10:00 to 12:00 noon via Zoom.

Cllr Paul Harvey, committee
chair
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