

DRAFT MINUTES | MANAGEMENT BOARD

26 January 2021

Welcome and apologies

Cllr Sue Baxter welcomed members to the first meeting of 2021 and wish them a happy New Year.

Present:

Cllr Sue Baxter, national chairman; Cllr Keith Stevens, vice chairman finance; Cllr Mike Drew vice chairman member services; Cllr Derek Liddell,; Cllr Peter Davey, chairman finance and scrutiny committee; David Francis chairman policy committee; Cllr Mike Scott, Cllr Ken Browse, Cllr Bob Blezzard,

Also present: Jonathan Owen, chief executive, Steve Walker, head of finance and administration.

- 1. Apologies received:** Cllr Richard Parry
- 2. Minutes of the meeting held on 17 November 2020**

The minutes of the previous meeting were received as a correct record.

Civility in the sector: NALC position on the LGA's national code of conduct

It was reported that the Local Government Association (LGA) had published a new code of conduct for councillors on the 23rd of December following the recommendations of the committee on standards in public life. NALC, policy committee, county officers, county associations and councils had had the opportunity to respond to the LGA's consultation and to contribute to the drafting of the new code. The code was for the whole of local government and many of the points made by NALC had been addressed. The views of county officers were being sought [subsequently at a meeting of the county officer's forum they indicated their broad support for the code as a good starting point which could be reviewed and updated in a year's time.

Cllr Francis argued that as the code was for all tiers of local government it did not necessarily address the specific needs of the parish and town councils sector. He felt there may be a need to provide some reinterpretations or further guidance for parish councils so that they were clear about what they were signing up to. Accordingly he could not support advising National Assembly to recommend councils adopt the code. He also noted that the committee on standards in public life was currently conducting a wider consultation on standards to which the policy

committee was responding and which would provide the opportunity to make some of the more general remarks on how to improve standards more generally.

The chief executive reported that the Local Government Association (LGA) was commissioning further work in support of the anticipated would address the local council sector too.

In discussion there was general support for the new code and agreement that it should replace NALC's own code which would no longer be produced. The point was made that NALC's real concern was to see the standards regime have teeth by way of sanctions and other enforcement procedures. These were just as important as the code. It was noted that depending on the supplementary LGA advice there may be need to provide additional commentary and that could be picked up in the light of operating the new code.

Noting the opposition of Cllr Francis, the board agreed to propose to national assembly in March that it recommend councils adopt the code and NALC cease to produce its own code.

1. Society of Local Council Clerks: update on recent meetings and new national framework

The chief executive reported on discussions with the Society of Local Councils Clerks (SLCC) on promoting good standards in the sector following the SLCC's conference in October.

NALC was concerned at a number of poor relationships that were detrimental to the sectors' ability to meet residents need. There were cases of bad behaviour between councillors and clerks and between councillors, clerks and some members of the public, especially through social media. This was not a problem unique to the sector and tensions over the last year due to the pandemic seems to have exacerbated the situation.

The SLCC felt that there had been a significant increase in the volume of bullying since the last survey of clerks and are currently conducting another survey.

In discussion the board expressed its concerns about this matter and stressed the importance of working with the SLCC and other agencies including the LGA to promote civility in public life. To deliver this would require significant resource and it was agreed to seek the support of NALC's HR partners HRSP. As well as ensuring councils had appropriate HR processes and policies there would need to be wider work on behaviours and better understanding of the respective roles of clerks and councillors.

It was agreed to have a meeting with the SLCC to discuss a project specification to make progress in this important area.

The board also considered the related issue of the outdated national agreement between NALC and SLCC on terms and conditions for the sect sector. It agreed to consult county offices on a replacement national framework to advise councils on these matters.

2. Relations between county associations and NALC's ability/role to intervene where issues arose

The chief executive reported on discussions between the Surrey, East and West Sussex associations on the continuation of the current partnership arrangement. A number of councils and other bodies had expressed concerns about the proposed termination of the partnership being considered by the West Sussex Association.

Management Board agreed that the NALC constitution was clear, that councils need to be a member of the home county association in order to access membership of the national association. It also agreed that it was a matter for individual associations to determine how they operated and where they accessed local services from.

It was noted that a number of councils were indicating that they might withdraw from membership in the light of these developments and it was agreed that NALC should monitor the situation and consider if any further steps necessary.

It was agreed to write to the associations stressing the importance of strong county associations supporting councils and the benefits of good relationships and partnerships.

On a related matter the board noted with concern that the Hampshire Association and the Isle of Wight Association have been unable to find a satisfactory solution to the issues discussed at the AGM in 2019. Concerns were expressed that copyright material might be made available to non-members councils on the Isle of Wight. The chair and vice-chair (member services) would be contacting the Hampshire Association of Local Councils to discuss these matters further.

3. Date of next meeting

The next meeting will be held on 6 April 2021.

The board also agreed to seek to have a catch-up meeting on 16 March 2021.