

NATIONAL ASSEMBLY | DRAFT MINUTES

9 March 2021

Via zoom

National Assembly	
Cllr Mike Drew	Avon Association of Local Councils
Cllr Elizabeth Luder	Bedfordshire Association of Town and Parish Councils
Cllr Mike Tew	Cambridgeshire Association of Local Councils
Cllr Lillian Burns	Cheshire Association of Local Councils
Cllr Graham Ford	Cornwall Association of Local Councils
Cllr Jonathan Davies	Cumbria Association of Local Councils
Cllr John Plant	Derbyshire Association of Local Councils
Cllr Ken Browse	Devon Association of Local Councils
Cllr Janet Wallace	Dorset Association of Parish and Town Councils
Cllr Keith Stevens	East Sussex Association of Local Councils
Cllr Brian Brooks	East Riding North Lincolnshire of Local Councils
Cllr Peter Davey	Essex Association of Local Councils
Cllr Rob McCarthy	Hertfordshire Association of Local Councils
Cllr Bob Blezzard	Isle of Wight Association of Local Councils
Cllr Richard Parry	Kent Association of Local Councils
Cllr Colin Peacock	Lancashire Association of Local Councils
Cllr Tony Howard	Lincolnshire Association of Local Councils
Cllr Tony Hiron	Leicestershire and Rutland Association of Local Councils

Cllr Phil Harris	Norfolk Association of Local Councils
Cllr Mick Baker	Nottinghamshire Association of Local Councils
Cllr Mike Scott	Northamptonshire Association of Local Councils
Cllr David Francis	Northumberland Association of Local Councils
Cllr Avis Thomas	North Yorkshire Association of Local Councils
Cllr Malcolm Leeding MBE	Oxfordshire Association Local Councils
Cllr David Beechey	Shropshire Association of Local Councils
Cllr Steve Cosser	Surrey Association of Local Councils
Cllr Jenny Lawrence	Somerset Association Local Councils
Cllr Derek Liddell	South Yorkshire Association of Local Councils
Cllr Mark Valladares	Suffolk Association of Local Councils
Cllr Rosie Weaver, BEM (for part)	Warwickshire and West Midlands Association of Local Councils
Cllr Peter Allison	West Yorkshire Association of Local Councils
Cllr John Scragg	Wiltshire Association of Local Councils
Cllr Brian Kerr, OBE	Vice president

Staff present:

Jonathan Owen, chief executive
Justin Griggs, head of policy & communications
Charlotte Eisenhart, head of member services
Steve Walker, head of finance and administration

Claire Goldfinch, projects officer (for part)
Farhana Miah, executive officer
Olivia Kane, receptionist
Claire FitzGerald, administration manager

Chairman welcome:

The chairman welcomed representatives to the meeting and asked assembly members to reflect on the following colleague who had recently passed away:

- Robin Went CBE DL (former NALC chief executive)

Minutes of the previous meeting:

The Assembly confirmed that the minutes of the meeting of National Assembly held on 8 December were accurate.

In matters arising Cllr Liddell requested for his attendance to be amended in the minutes.

RESOLVED: That the chairman be authorised to sign the draft minutes of National Assembly held on 8 December 2021 as a true record of the proceedings.

Changes in representation:

The following changes in representation were noted:

- Cllr Brian Brooks, East Riding North Lincolnshire of Local Councils
- Cllr Alan Humphries, Worcestershire Association of Local Councils
- Cllr Jenny Lawrence, Somerset Association of Local Councils
- Cllr Dave Fleming, County Durham Association of Local Councils
- Cllr Malcolm Butler, Hampshire Association of Local Councils
- Cllr Jonathan Davies, Cumbria Association of Local Councils

The new councillors were welcomed and each briefly introduced themselves setting out their experience and ambitions for the sector.

Updates from NALC committees:

Management Board

The chairman reported that Management Board had proposed to put a recommendation forward on adopting the code of conduct (see item below)

Finance and Scrutiny committee:

Cllr Davey reported that NALC's finances were sound with a projected year end surplus of £13,000. The next meeting in July will focus on the governance review which will involve making amendments to the following documents:

- Pensions Explained
- Financial regulations
- The Constitution
- Risk Assessment and Business Recovery
- Financial Overview

Cash balances at this point are healthy and amounted to approx. £494k compared to £474k in the previous year. On current performance at the lowest point of the year our cash position will be circa £300k. Cllr Parry queried about the current pension scheme, Steve Walker, reported that NALC had two schemes, the local government pension scheme and pensions trust. New staff were currently being enrolled into the pensions trust scheme.

Policy committee:

Cllr Francis welcomed comments on the report, in addition to this, the committee are busy working on the motions received and thanked the county associations for sending them. Recent meetings have focused on extending the deadline for accounts and audit for local councils and principal authorities and the green paper on procurement in the public sector. Cllr Blezzard asked for clarity around face to face meetings as councils are required to meet for their annual meetings and local elections. Justin Griggs head of policy and communications, reported that NALC have been lobbying on this extensively with the MHCLG and stakeholders, and the corona virus webpage will be updated on new developments.

Smaller councils committee:

Cllr Ford provided an update on SCC, the committee is going forward with informal meetings which have been a success, and is considering seeking further information on councils signing up to take action on the climate emergency.

Resolved: That the updates on committees report be received.

Civility in the sector: NALC position on the LGA's national code of conduct. **Joint work with Society of Local Council Clerks (SLCC)**

The chairman spoke on the LGA's national code of conduct and proposed the recommendation from management board that NALC recommends councils and county associations to consider adopting the new LGA code and that NALC ceases to publish its own code.

Cllr Hirons has reported that Leicestershire and Rutland Association and Principal authority colleagues have highlighted some issues with the code, lawyers in local government confirmed recently a number of authorities have advised not to adopt the model code of conduct..

Cllr Baxter reported that recent correspondence from Luke Hall MP, announcing the government would respond to the committee on standards in public life consultation, was a step in the right direction and NALC are trying their best to move the debate forward on sanctions. The chief executive welcomed feedback on the new code from Cllr Hirons and others to feed into the annual review of the code.

The chairman invited National Assembly to recommend the code to county associations and local councils and for NALC to cease the production of its own code as set out in the board's minute:

'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.'

Resolved: That councils and county associations be advised to adopt the code and NALC cease to produce its own code. (26 voted for adopting the code of conduct, three voted against and one abstention).

The chairman reported on the recent meeting with SLCC, and the aim is to set up a joint project working closely with them to promote civility in the sector addressing concerns about inappropriate behaviour by councillors, clerks and the public. SLCC and NALC will set up a small group to work on this and regular reports would be made on progress.

Resolved: That the report be received.

Launch of Good Councillors Guide to Cyber Security in partnership with Microshade

National Assembly members were given a presentation by David Astwood from Microshade, on the recently published The Good Councillors Guide to Cyber Security. The presentation provided a summary of what the guide provides. The guide aims to help local councils understand the importance of cyber security and provides practical advice on minimizing risks to the council. It also features information on understanding the most common threats such as phishing, viruses, loss of data and how some simple steps can help protect the council's data and equipment. To read the guide for free, please [log in](#) and see Development tools.

Resolved: To receive the presentation on the Good Councillors Guide to Cyber Security.

The Task and Finish Group - Governance

The chief executive provided an update on the Task and Finish group to assess the implications of remote working and how the committees have been working over the last year. There was a broad consensus that there are some benefits of having face to face meetings and remote meetings which would be put forward to future planning.

Cllr Liddell asked if guidelines will be set when there is to be a face to face meetings, and provide enough notice to colleagues. The chairman noted that it will be noted in the calendar as to which meeting is a face to face and which one is remote.

Resolved: That the Task and Finish Group - Governance report be received and its general direction supported.

Monitoring and managing performance and service delivery

The chairman asked Assembly if they have any questions on the activity report. The chief executive encouraged national assembly to stand for the Assembly Elections at the end of year and informal meetings will be organised for networking.

Cllr Blezzard asked for an update on when the Devolution White Paper will be published, the chairman stated that the government has been preoccupied with the pandemic and it is still very much on the agenda to lobby with the MHCLG. Justin Griggs explained that they have plans to publish later in the year and will ask that question in upcoming meetings.

Cllr McCarthy suggested if it would be possible to detail what quarter the report covers as well as who the author of the report is. The chief executive noted and will take comments on board.

Cllr Francis asked for a brief update on the review of the practitioners guide on council audit with JPAG, the chief executive advised that the final practitioners guide is currently being revised and will be circulated end of March.

Resolved: That the activity report be received.

Next meeting

RESOLVED: That the next meeting of National Assembly be held on 13 July 2021 via zoom. We are also proposing to hold more open councillor sessions in the April and June. Dates to be confirmed.

COUNCILLOR SUE BAXTER