

NATIONAL ASSEMBLY OPEN COUNCILLOR | DRAFT MINUTES

13 April 2021

Via zoom

Around fifty assembly members, county association councillors and chief officers met on 13th of April in NALC's latest "open house" session designed to informally consider topical issues.

HRH Prince Philip

The chairman of the Association Sue Baxter welcomed members to the informal meeting and reported that she had submitted condolences on behalf of the sector on the death of HRH Prince Philip and that she had subsequently written Princess Anne, who had attended our 2019 conference, expressing sympathy on the death of her father.

Breakout/Workshop sessions

The meeting then split into four breakout rooms to hold workshop sessions to discuss aspirations for the sector and what needed to be done to address and deliver on those aspirations.

The notes of those sessions are attached at appendix 1. If attendees have anything to add please let us know.

A vote was subsequently held to identify the mood of the meeting in relationship to those discussions.

The top three aspirations were

1. To achieve the parishing of the whole of England
2. For the sector to be taken seriously and its potential recognised by other tiers of government and the public sector
3. To secure access to relevant government funding

The top four steps to address them were

1. Improve councillor quality and representation through training and new standards regime
2. Give greater powers to councils
3. Review the general power of competence to enable more councils to benefit from it.

4. No capping or referendum principles

The results of the votes are attached at appendix two.

These will be considered by policy committee as part of their refresh of NALC prospectus.

Unitary debate

Cllr Francis on behalf of Policy Committee introduced a discussion on the current MHCLG consultation on establishing unitary government in Cumbria, North Yorkshire and Somerset. A draft response - NALC Statement on Unitary Government - had been prepared by the committee and the views of the meeting were sought.

A number of issues and themes were identified including:

- Importance of seed funding county associations to help support the process of setting up new councils.
- It was important that the sector was involved in the discussions on the ground from an early stage and that the sector's views be reflected in the final decision.
- The process should be grassroots lead.
- It would be helpful to have reference in the submission to devolving assets and services; and associated funding
- There was general support for a single unitary structure across a clear geographical area, probably the county. The experience of multi-unitary government in some county areas had led to confusion..
- It was considered that the response could be sharpened up and David Francis agreed to review the response in light of comments received and invited and members to send him or Chris Borg any comments.

Assembly members then voted on the principles in the paper and agreed its submission to the Government with appropriate amendments.

Date of next meeting

It would be helpful to hear from members whether they felt this kind of meeting continued to be useful and if so what topics would you like considered.

Appendix 1

Notes from workshop / breakout group discussions

Task 1 : What are your top three aspirations for the sector?

Task 2 : What are the three most important issues that need to be addressed to achieve these?

Ray Wickson's group

Aspirations...

1. Parishing all of England
2. access to government funding
3. more clout and influence in planning system (right of appeal, protection for NPs, seat at table)

Addressed by...

1. No council tax referendums
2. training and development
3. GPC for all

Keith Stevens' Group

Aspirations:

1. Parishing the whole of the country with quality parishes
2. greater authority to local councils with direct access to funding
3. consulted more with respect given to our opinions by District and County councils

Addressed by:

1. Respect has to be earned ... we need more people to stand for elections we need more quality parishes
2. we need to define what is a quality parish....do we need parish meetings or should they merge with neighbouring parishes
3. CALCs need to be equal in quality and have funding provided

Jonathan Davies' group

Aspirations:

1. Better recognition of sector inc in resilience planning
2. Parish councils everywhere
3. Sector taken seriously by other tiers & access to funding streams
4. Greater collaboration between tiers
5. Planning influence

Addressed by:

1. Encourage elections (costs shouldn't be an impediment)
2. Better sharing of good practice
3. GPC/training development and standards
4. Extend coverage of ombudsman

Summarised as:

1. recognition & collaboration
2. look at GPC
3. extend coverage of ombudsman

Mike Drew's Group

Summarised as

1. Improve Councillor quality and representation through training and standards
2. Improve finances via access to variety of funding e.g. business rates but would need an equalisation as distribution of business are not evenly spread.
3. give greater powers to Local Councils - clarifying duties and powers

Appendix two - Vote results

Key Issues:



