

NATIONAL ASSEMBLY | DRAFT MINUTES

Date: 5 April 2022
Time: 10:00 – 12:00
Venue: Zoom

Present:

Cllr Peter Allison, Cllr Mike Baker, Cllr Sue Baxter, Cllr Bob Blezzard, Cllr Brian Brooks, Cllr Lillian Burns, Cllr David Chalmers, Cllr Stephen Cosser, Cllr Peter Davey (vice-chair finance), Cllr Jonathan Davies, Cllr Mike Drew (vice-chair member services), Cllr Graham Ford, Cllr David Francis, Cllr Marion Fox Goddard, Cllr Stephen Hann, Cllr Reece Harrington (Lincolnshire ALC deputy), Cllr Tony Howard, Cllr Jennifer Lawrence, Cllr Sue Lintern, Cllr Elizabeth Luder, Cllr Rob McCarthy, Cllr Richard Parry, Cllr Colin Peacock, Cllr Douglas Denham St Pinnock, Cllr Peter Quinn, Cllr Loraine Rappe, Cllr Katharine Keats-Rohan, Cllr John Scragg, Cllr Keith Stevens (chair), Cllr Ron Simpson*, Cllr Mike Tew, Cllr Mark Valladares, Cllr Ray Wickson, Cllr Rosie Weaver BEM, Cllr Duncan Wright.

Apologies received: Cllr Ansell, Cllr Beachey, Cllr Harvey, Cllr Hiron* and Cllr Plant.

*Substitute

NALC staff

Jonathan Owen chief executive, Steve Walker head of finance and administration, Justin Griggs head of policy and communications, Chris Borg policy manager (for part), Nick Howell campaigns officer, Farhana Miah executive officer, Claire FitzGerald administration manager, Beverley Brown finance and admin officer, and Jessica Lancod-Frost policy officer.

1. Chair's introductions

The chair welcomed representatives to the meeting and asked assembly members to reflect on the recent passing of Cllr Jim Wingham and Cllr Peter Richmond.

Changes in representatives:

- Cllr Katharine Keats-Rohan was welcomed into the assembly and briefly set out her experience and ambitions for the sector. She was a member of Wallingford Town Council, a retired historian, and an enthusiast to tackle climate change, encourage working together and improving standards.
- Tony Howard introduced his deputy Reece Harrington who was a young councillor in Lincolnshire.

2. Minutes 8 December 2021 and 16 September 2021

National assembly confirmed that the minutes from 8 December were accurate. Minutes from 16 September were also received as requested and were approved, subject to amendments to attendance and voting record.

Resolved: That the minutes of meetings held in December and September (as amended) be approved.

3. Committee issues

Finance and Scrutiny Committee

Cllr Ford spoke on recent meetings of Finance and Scrutiny Committee. He noted that the committee is closely monitoring budgets for the next two years. He also encouraged members to put themselves forward to fill the vacancy on the committee.

Policy Committee

Cllr Francis reported that Policy Committee had met twice since December and noted the following:

- Motions were received from a number of county associations which was encouraging, and he urged colleagues to continue to flag up issues for national consideration.
- Approval of a work programme for the year.
- The levelling up White Paper would continue to be an important item for the committee's consideration.

Larger Councils Committee

Cllr Parry provided an update in the absence of Cllr Harvey. The committee will have their first face to face meeting in May. They had agreed a work programme for the year and had a full complement of members.

Smaller Councils Committee

Cllr Ford provided an update on the work of the committee:

- A survey had been prepared and sent out to county associations asking them to gather the views of smaller councils on their expectations of the committee and NALC.
- Cllr Burns indicated that she will be analysing the results of the survey and encouraged members of the assembly to ensure their councils completed the survey. The results will be shared widely and inform the committee's work programme.
- She encouraged members to come forward to fill the two vacancies on the committee.

Management Board

Cllr Stevens provided an update on the recent meeting of Management Board. He noted the board discussed how to encourage more members to sit on committees, how to support county associations and county officers more effectively and the terms of reference of the governance review. The chief executive also added that the board discussed the article in Financial Times regarding levelling up which is now available on the NALC website.

Resolved: That the reports be received.

4. National Assembly draft work programme

The chief executive proposed the draft work programme for National Assembly including:

- Continue to work on committee issues and campaign issues which would be alternated at each meeting.
- The big themes/campaign issues would include housing and planning and encouraging joint working/ regional engagement between county associations.
- To hold a face-to-face grand reunion meeting on 12 July for members and stakeholders following a hybrid meeting focussed on business issues.
- Informal meeting/open councillor sessions will also continue and there may be merit in holding one on Ukraine.

In discussion there was strong support for including levelling up and devolution as a potential standing item.

Cllr Stevens noted that he and Cllr Baxter had recently attended a District Council Conference. The speakers had talked about parish councils and indicated that district councils need to consult with their parish councils more. He was pleased with the work NALC had done in playing a part in this.

There were some discussions had around this and National Assembly expressed the importance of district councils working collaboratively with their parish councils. The LGA commissioned consultancy report was referred to and assembly members were encouraged use that report to take forward with their district, county, and unitary councils to improve joint working.

The chief executive reflected that Levelling Up should be a semi-standing item for future National Assembly meetings.

Resolved: That the National Assembly draft work programme be agreed.

5. Finance update from vice chair (finance)

Cllr Davey gave an update on NALC's current financial position and introduced several supporting reports designed to increase awareness and transparency around NALC's financial position, which was generally good, although the need to enhance reserves to cover cash flow issues was stressed.

Cllr Valladares welcomed the improved reporting and queried whether the staffing cost estimate was realistic given inflation predictions and the knock-on effect on pay. He also asked similarly about the office costs given uncertainty over the use and future of 109. Cllr Davey stated that future budgets would need to be looked at in the light of these issues.

Cllr Ford confirmed that the Finance and Scrutiny Committee would be considering these points too.

Resolved: That the finance reports be received.

6. Update from policy and communications

6.1. Star Councils Awards

Justin Griggs, head of policy and communications provided an update on NALC's Star Councils Awards 2022. He spoke about the success of the awards last year and was hoping to continue the momentum this year. A communications pack had been circulated to county associations. He asked National Assembly members to promote this work. He also encouraged smaller councils to apply for the awards. More information can be found [here](#).

6.2. International Women's day

Justin noted the recent campaign on International Women's Day and that with support of NALC's Women Councillors' Network, a video on the contribution of women clerks and councillors had been produced which had been well received. You can view the video [here](#).

6.3. Local Council Review (LCR)

Justin provided an update on the future of LCR magazine. Due to the association's commitment to digital first and tackling the climate emergency, together with recent staffing changes, LCR content would be incorporated in the NALC website.

There were discussions around the timings of the issues and concerns were raised on lack of notice and knock-on impact on invoicing councils.

The chief executive apologised for the timing which had been exacerbated by the departure of the editor. Justin would work with county associations to ensure this would be completed as smoothly as possible.

Resolved: That the reports be noted.

7. Governance update

7.1. Task and Finish Group - terms of reference

The chief executive reported that a previous National Assembly meeting had agreed to set up a task and finish group to look at how NALC committees were working, their effectiveness and NALC's current electoral process. Management Board had proposed to set up a task and finish group of eight members possibly from the different regions and that Cllr Harvey would lead the group. A draft term of reference had been circulated for agreement.

Cllr Drew suggested that in discussion of the future of Larger and Smaller Councils Committee consideration should be given to whether they should be a committee or network.

Discussion focussed on whether the TFG should be constituted from representatives from the regions and a motion proposing this by Cllr Blezzard was agreed.

The chief executive was authorised to send out a note asking National Assembly members to appoint one representative from their regions for the group.

The chief executive added that the task and finish group would not be the only forum to discuss these issues, there would be other opportunities to discuss governance matters including in future assembly meetings.

It was moved, seconded, and agreed by National Assembly to carry the motion forward with three against and one abstention and the chief executive was authorised to write accordingly.

Resolved: That the task and finish group be set up based on the terms of reference circulated and aim to report the assembly in the summer.

7.2. Vacancies on NALC committees

Cllr Stevens noted that three nominations had been received for Management Board. Cllr Burns, Cllr Rappe and Cllr Ansell. As Cllr Burns is on Policy Committee, current rules would not enable her to sit on Management Board.

Cllr Stevens noted that Management Board recommended Cllr Rappe and Cllr Ansell be appointed to management board and that Cllr Ansell be appointed to the larger councils' committee.

He noted the following vacancies on the committees continued and encouraged members to stand:

Management Board Committee- one vacancy
Finance and Scrutiny Committee- one vacancy
Policy Committee - one vacancy
Smaller Councils Committee - two vacancies

Cllr Blezzard noted that there had been a few expressions of interest for Smaller Councils Committee and the gaps would soon be filled.

Resolved: That a note be sent out to national assembly seeking members to appoint one representative from each region.

Resolved: That the Management Board vacancies be filled by Cllr Rappe and Cllr Ansell. Cllr Ansell also be appointed to the Larger Councils committee.

8. Discussion items

8.1. Civility and respect: Government response on ethical standards

Justin Griggs, head of policy and communications reported that the Government had belatedly responded to the Committee on Standards in Public Life (COSIPL) 2018 report on local government ethical standards. The association had issued a statement expressing its disappointment at the nature of the government's response and especially its rejection of sanctions for councillors that did not behave appropriately.

He identified few relevant issues for assembly:

- NALC's statement had been quoted in the prestigious Municipal Journal.

- NALC had lobbied for tougher sanctions for councillors which had successfully influenced the COSIPL's initial report.
- The Government's slim 12-page response on 18 March 2022 dismissed nearly all the report's recommendations but committed to further work to support local government and seek views on options to strengthen sanctions involving serious incidents of bullying and harassment or disruptive behaviour.
- NALC should work with the government on the areas where they have committed to further work to support local government and explore strengthening sanctions.
- NALC should continue to work with partners and others to press for the changes needed to strengthen the standards regime.

In discussion assembly members broadly agreed with the stance NALC had taken. Cllr Francis indicated that policy committee discuss a fuller response to all the issues the government had raised.

The National Assembly held a virtual poll and endorsed, with one member against, the following statement:

"This National Assembly wholeheartedly endorses NALC's statement on the government's response to the Committee on Standards in Public Life report on local government ethical standards, and strongly urges the government to rethink its position, particularly regarding the suspension of councillors."

Resolved: That NALC's views on the government's statement be publicised.

8.2. Ukraine:

National Assembly were invited to hold an informal meeting to share intelligence on how their county associations and councils are helping Ukraine. The chief executive suggested to potentially hold an evening meeting.

Date and times of next meetings:

The next meeting of the National Assembly will be held on 12 July at 11.00 am followed by a face-to-face reception/grand reunion.

Venue to be confirmed.

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