

NATIONAL ASSEMBLY | DRAFT MINUTES

Date: 11 July 2023

Time: 11:00 – 15:00

Venue: NALC offices, The Bloomsbury Building, 10 Bloomsbury Way, Holborn, London, WC1A 2SL.

Present:

Cllr Mike Drew, Avon Association of Local Councils, Cllr Liz Luder, Bedfordshire Association of Town and Parish Councils, Cllr Paul Harvey, Buckinghamshire and Milton Keynes Association of Local Councils, Cllr Stuart Roden, Cornwall Association of Local Councils, Cllr Allan Blakemore, County Durham Association of Local Councils, Cllr Mary Bradley, Cumbria Association of Local Councils, Cllr Janet Wallace, Dorset Association of Parish and Town Councils, Cllr Keith Stevens, East Sussex Association of Local Councils, Cllr Peter Davey, Essex Association of Local Councils, Cllr Loraine Rappé, Hampshire Association of Local Councils, Cllr Marcus Allen, Herefordshire Association of Local Councils, Cllr Rob McCarthy, Hertfordshire Association Town and Parish of Local Councils, Cllr Bob Blezzard, Isle of Wight Association of Local Councils, Cllr Sarah Barker, Kent Association of Local Councils, Cllr Alan Neal, Lancashire Association of Local Councils, Cllr Tony Hirons, Leicestershire and Rutland Association of Local Councils, Cllr Tony Howard, Lincolnshire Association of Local Councils, Cllr Heather Philips, North Yorkshire Association of Local Councils, Cllr Mick Baker, Nottinghamshire Association of Local Councils, Cllr David Francis, Northumberland Association of Local Councils, Cllr Katharine Keats-Rohan, Oxfordshire Association of Local Councils, Cllr Duncan Wright, South Yorkshire Association of Local Councils, Cllr Loretta Whetlor, Somerset Association of Local Councils, Cllr Mark Valladares, Suffolk Association of Local Councils, Cllr Peter Allison, West Yorkshire Association of Local Councils, Cllr John Scragg, Wiltshire Association of Local Councils, Cllr Sue Baxter, Worcestershire Association of Local Councils.

Apologies received:

Cllr John Plant, Cllr Richard Page, Cllr Patricia Ansell, Cllr Ian Cowling, Cllr Mike Scott, Cllr David Beechey and Cllr Douglas Denham St Pinnock.

NALC staff

Jonathan Owen chief executive, Steve Walker head of finance and administration, Justin Griggs head of policy and communications, Charlotte Eisenhart head of member services, Farhana Miah executive officer, Claire FitzGerald administration manager, Beverley Brown finance and admin officer, Jessica Lancod-Frost policy officer, Olivia Kane receptionist, and Greg Henry finance and admin officer.

1. Chair's introductions

The chair welcomed representatives to the meeting. The chair reported on recent positive developments including:

- A successful attendance at the LGA conference with a well-attended fringe session with the LGA's political group leaders setting out why they believed the sector was important. You can read their contributions [here](#).
- The opening up of the government's community ownership fund to applications from parish and town councils, which he hoped would be one of many national grants the sector could access.
- Amendments to the Levelling Up and Regeneration Bill in the house of Lords, supported by our President Baroness Scott of Needham Market which if passed would address NALC's policy objectives around remote meetings, dependents carers allowances for parish councils and clarification of the position around grant aiding places of worship.

Changes in representatives:

- Cllr Stuart Roden was welcomed to the assembly and briefly set out his experience and ambitions for the sector. He was recently appointed as chair the Cornwall association. He looks forward to his new role.
- Cllr Marcus Allen from Herefordshire. He is working closely with the county association to find more councillors for the councils.
- Cllr Alan Neal from Lancashire. Working closely with county associations to increase council memberships and recently been appointed to the northern group.
- Cllr Sarah Barker interim rep for Kent. She advised assembly that the new representative for Kent would be elected in time for the next assembly meeting in October.

2. Minutes 4 April 2023

National Assembly confirmed that the minutes from 4 April 2023 were accurate.

Resolved: That the minutes of the meeting held on 4 April 2023 be approved.

3. NALC committee elections

Claire FitzGerald administration manager delivered a presentation on the NALC committee elections. The presentation focussed on the timescales for nominations and the voting platforms. The nomination period would open on 23 August closing on 18 October with the voting taking place during November with results being announced at assembly on 29 November.

She reported that NALC would once again be collaborating with UK engage for the elections. She proposed a few changes to the process compared to the previous election cycle to improve its efficiency.

One significant change put forward was that the nominations would be submitted directly into the UK engage website. This proposed alteration aimed to streamline the nominations and facilitate a smoother and more efficient election process. Additionally, it was emphasised the importance of implementing a communications plan to advertise the elections effectively. This measure would ensure that the direct elections were managed more effectively this time around and increasing awareness among the relevant stakeholders.

There was a discussion that took place on this, and the following points were raised:

- Cllr Blezzard raised concerns about the previous direct elections for the Smaller Councils Committee expressing dissatisfaction with the process. He suggested a potential solution to improve the elections by proposing that county associations be provided with a voting link to share with smaller councils. This approach would enable direct voting participation from smaller councils potentially addressing the issues faced in the previous election.
- Additionally, Cllr Blezzard sought clarification regarding the disparity in the number of members on the Larger Councils Committee and Smaller Councils Committee. He sought clarification on why there was a difference in the composition of these committees and reasons behind it.
- Cllr Neal put forward a suggestion regarding the organisation of committees, Cllr Neal proposed that Finance committee should be separated from the Scrutiny committee as they serve distinct purposes.
- Cllr Valladares raised concerns about several challenges faced during the election process. One of the specific challenges mentioned was a limitation on engagement, which resulted from a lack of awareness and familiarity with the candidates being put forward.

It was acknowledged that the process for voting on the direct elections to smaller councils had not been particularly successful in 2021 and as a result, changes to the process had been agreed with UK Engage and together with a strong awareness campaign she is confident that these problems would be eliminated. The chair encouraged members to promote the work of the elections in their county associations and local councils.

Resolved: That the presentation be noted.

4. Why get involved in the committees?

The chief executive asked chairs of committees to outline why colleagues should put themselves forward for elections.

The chair of the Association spoke about how Management Board plays a crucial role in facilitating coordination and collaboration among the various committees within NALC. By bringing together the chairs of different committees, the board enables sharing of insights, perspectives, and updates on the work being conducted. It serves as a platform for discussing the overall functioning and

effectiveness of NALC, as well as addressing any perceptions or feedback received from the sector.

The chief executive highlighted that one of the possible new objectives of the board is to identify portfolios for its members. These portfolios would define the specific roles and responsibilities of each member within the board. He reported that the primary role of Management Board members would be to assist NALC in operating effectively while adhering to governance practices, and support staff in their work.

The chair of finance reported that the Finance and Scrutiny Committee plays a crucial role in ensuring best value money for NALC and CALCs. The committee looks at governance related aspects which examines financial governance practices to ensure compliance, transparency, and accountability in financial management.

In addition to this, plans would be considered to separate the finance and scrutiny roles.

He encouraged members to join the committee emphasising that it provides valuable insights into the financial operations of NALC.

The chair of Policy Committee highlighted that it focuses on outward-facing governance for NALC. The committee's primary objective is to engage with external stakeholders and create conducive conditions for local councils to flourish. This may involve advocating for changes to legislation or other measures that positively impact the functioning and development of local councils. The Committee also encouraged and considered motions from county associations.

The chair of Larger Councils Committee reported members must be from Larger Councils to join the committee. The committee works collaboratively with Policy Committee to feedback to members. Committee organises good sharing practices visits. MPs and civil servants occasionally join the meetings.

5. To note the following proposed appointments to current committee until new elections:

- Cllr David Francis – Smaller Councils Committee
- Cllr Allan Blakemore – Smaller Councils Committee
- Cllr Marcus Allen – Smaller Councils Committee
- Cllr Mark Valladares - Smaller Councils Committee
- Cllr Mike Scott – Finance and Scrutiny Committee
- Cllr Stuart Roden - Management Board
- Cllr Katharine Keats-Rohan – Larger Councils Committee

Assembly unanimously approved the nominations put forward.

Resolved: That the appointments be made as set out above.

6. Strategic update

The chief executive spoke to the strategic report outlining the work that NALC had undertaken in response to the motion passed at the last assembly meeting. He emphasized that the office move symbolised a fresh start and a significant opportunity to review how NALC operates.

The report focused on the key strategic objectives for NALC:

- Support for CALCs: NALC aims to provide high quality support to CALCs so they can effectively assist member councils. This support includes providing resources, guidance, and training to CALCs.
- Raising profile: NALC continuing to increase visibility and influence by engaging with government, media, and national stakeholders. The objective is to raise awareness of the important work carried out by local councils and to advocate for their interests at a national level.
- Celebrating Councils: NALC intend to highlight and celebrate the achievements and contributions of local councils which would be facilitated through various mediums, such as the "Points of Light" publication, which acknowledges outstanding community efforts and Star Council Awards.

NALC's operating model includes:

- Collaborative Partnerships: Working closely with other organisations including BHIB and SAAA to provide support to members. These collaborations involved sharing resources, expertise, and best practises to strengthen support system for CALC's and member councils.
- Outsourcing corporate services such as HR, payroll, and IT
- Financial strategy: 85% of fixed expenditure will be met from affiliation fees, this would provide a steady income stream. NALC will continue as well to secure partnerships which would benefit councils and provide a financial reward to NALC.
- Accommodation strategy: NALC staff are currently required to come into the office two days a week. This indicates a hybrid work model where staff have the flexibility to work remotely for the remaining days. By requiring staff to come into the office twice a week, NALC aims to maintain a level of in-person collaboration and communication. Current office arrangements are working well and would be reviewed next year considering experience and staff and councillor views.
- NALC will review its staffing structure in the light of the new operating model in 2023/24.

The building at 109 Great Russell Street had sold in April for £2.75m compared to the net book value in the balance sheet of £2.5m. These Funds are currently being held on Deposit at CCLA giving a good return and pending a more detailed investment strategy and review of our current treasury management policy.

Resolved: That the report be noted.

7. Governance changes proposals from Management Board

The chair introduced the governance item and ran through each proposal.

Proposal 1: Definition of local council.

Name and title etc. Amend paragraph three vision etc. To define local councils in line with the local government act 1972.

Parish and town councils are the tier of statutory local government that is closest to the electorate, their legal foundation provided by the Local Government Act 1972. Parish councils may resolve to call themselves town, neighbourhood, community, or village councils. Parish councils for areas that have been granted city status by royal charter are known as city councils. Collectively they are often referred to as local councils, the term used throughout this constitution.

Resolved: That the proposal be adopted.

Proposal two: include reference to unitary authorities e.g., Cornwall Council

Membership section – amend section b to include reference to unitary authorities.

“The National Association shall be organised as a number of independent, self-governing associations, as determined from time to time by the National Assembly, based on one or more county or unitary authorities in England, or on a regional grouping of these bodies except in London, where there shall be a London Association.

Resolved: That the proposal be adopted with twenty-two voting in favor and five against.

Proposal three: regional groupings of county associations

County Associations section – include reference to regional groupings to reflect current position e.g., FEMALC, SERCAF etc. Insert new “d) county associations may be organized into regional groupings to support their work.”

Resolved: That the proposal be adopted set out as above.

Proposal 4: To allow on-line voting and remote meetings.

Governance section:

Insert new paragraph to allow for meetings and votes to be held on-line or in person.

“Proceedings of the Association’s governance structures can be conducted on-line or in person. Elections to those governance structures and voting or ballots can be

conducted on-line, electronically or in person as appropriate.”

Resolved: National Assembly agreed with the proposal set out above.

Proposal 5: Motions

Annual and Special General Meeting section – amend to clarify that county associations, regional groupings and policy committee can submit motions to the AGM.

“To consider such motions as may have been submitted by county associations, regional groupings, or the Policy Committee provided that notice of motions are given in writing no later than forty-two clear days before the date of the Annual General Meeting. Amendments to such motions should normally be submitted in writing at least 7 days prior to the AGM.”

Cllr Francis suggested that standing orders and the constitution be reviewed ahead of the AGM as there are some inconsistencies around notices of meetings. To which the chair assured that work would be done on the corporate handbook.

Resolved: That the proposal be adopted as set out as above.

Proposal 6: Quorums

AGM and assembly sections

Quorums – amend relevant sections to read one third of those entitled to attend and vote (including remote attendance) for AGM and National Assembly (currently 25% and 20 respectively).

“The quorum of a General Meeting shall be one third of those entitled to attend and vote (including remote participation).”

“The quorum of the assembly shall be one third of its membership.”

Assembly did not approve of this proposal. An amended proposal was put forward set out as below:

Amended to ‘The quorum of a general meeting shall be one third attending and a third of the county associations in membership.’

The quorum for National Assembly would be unchanged.

Resolved: That the amended proposal be adopted set out as above.

Proposal 7: County representatives

The National Assembly section:

amend c) to allow county associations to appoint a representative to attend in the absence of their nominated representative or their deputy.

“A County Association in England may nominate one person to function as deputy for its member on the Assembly. If neither the nominated representative nor the deputy is available for a particular meeting, a County Association may appoint another person who is a member of their executive to attend, and that person shall enjoy full voting rights.”

Resolved: That the proposal be adopted set out as above.

Proposal 8 - to allow remote meetings.

Standing orders

Meetings of the assembly section. Add additional sentence. “Meetings can be held in person, remotely or a hybrid of the two.”

Appointment of committee’s section. Add additional sentence. “Meetings can be held in person, remotely or a hybrid of the two.”

Resolved: That the proposal be adopted set out as above.

Proposal 9 - Voting section, on-line/ electronic voting

Amend to read “The method of voting at meetings of the assembly shall be by show of hands (including virtual hands where appropriate)

Resolved: That the proposal be adopted set out as above.

Proposal 10 - Enable elections to committees and offices of the Association to be on-line.

Voting on appointments section

Add additional bullet point. “*Elections or ballots can be held on-line or electronically.*”

Resolved: That the proposal be adopted set out as above.

Proposal 11: To allow casual vacancies to be filled.

Insert new section “Casual vacancies that occur on committees can be filled on-line or by e-mail with the agreement of management board. “

Resolved: That the proposal be adopted set out as above.

Proposal 12: Voting arrangements

This proposal was supported by last year's AGM but not by the required majority. On further consideration this is a matter of standing orders.

Electoral arrangements (new section) Include the following new clauses under this section:

- a) Elections for the chair, vice-chairs, committees, and sub-committees shall be conducted using an online platform provided by Electoral Reform Services or a similar organisation.
- b) Elections for single posts shall be conducted using the alternative vote system.
- c) Elections where there are multiple seats to fill shall be conducted using the single transferrable vote system.

Resolved: That the proposal be adopted set out as above with one voting against.

Proposal 13: Smaller and Larger Council's Committees

Two options were identified for the National Assembly to consider.

1. Continue with existing arrangements for larger and smaller councils, including a super councils' network and new smallest councils' network.
2. Create a member services committee with representation from several networks or interest groups including the largest and smallest council committees/ networks.

A discussion took place, and the following points were raised:

- Councillor Allison stressed that it is crucial to consider the management and support provided to small councils, especially when they rely on CALCs for services.
- Cllr Baxter reported that NALC networks are working well, and larger/smaller councils would benefit from turning into a network as this would enable them to come together and share good practice.
- Cllr Francis supported creating a member services committee as it would be a positive step towards improving services for council members. In response to Cllr Francis's query about a timetable for creating the member services committee, the chair reported that once the agreement is reached, the

Management Board will develop a plan and take the necessary steps to move the process forward.

- Cllr Heather noted that it is important to have smaller networks which would enable small councils to have the right support.
- Cllr Blezzard stressed that the Smaller Councils Committee should be retained as it is, however, he emphasised the need to have networks for 'micro' councils.

The chief executive emphasised the need to consider the resource implications before NALC proceeds with all three committees: smaller, larger, and member services committee.

The chair proposed to proceed with proposal one while considering creating a member services committee that addresses the needs of smaller and larger councils, as well as the organization as a whole. This approach demonstrates an understanding of the importance of member services and the potential benefits it can bring.

Resolved: That the proposal be adopted as set out as above.

The National Assembly agreed to defer a proposal put forward by Isle of Wight to remove the facility for the county association providing the chair of the national association to have an additional representative, to the next meeting, subject to a proposal being submitted by the county association.

8. Net zero

Andrew Maliphant, NALC's representative on the net zero forum, provided an update on the work of the Climate Emergency Network which has over 300 members sharing good practice and identifying resources needed by the sector.

He reported that Climate Emergency Network holds regular plenary meetings to discuss key topics, some introduced by NALC and some network members. The network hosted a guest speaker Paul Behrens, who gave his perspective on responses to climate change based on his book "The Best of Times, the Worst of Times." Climate Emergency Network members include some county association officers together with SLCC contacts have now formed a joint working group the "Place-Based Initiative" to consider how best to gather and share climate action good practice nationally, not only for and with local councils, but also for and with the community groups in their council areas.

The objective of the initiative is not to replicate or replace existing advice, such as that already available via the NALC climate change webpage or from key websites

such as Repair Café or the Climate Emergency Network for Sustainable Energy, but to highlight it by including links to it from a single portal as well supporting active two-way sharing of emerging good practice from around the country.

Cllr Allen raised concerns on scammers and how councils can deal with that?

Andrew Maliphant highlighted that it is important for councils to thoroughly assess suppliers, as this would help identify reliable and trustworthy suppliers and promotes responsible procurement practises.

Utility Aid:

Emily Berry from Utility Aid gave a presentation on the services they provide. She spoke about how organisations/councils can reduce utility costs by minimizing on-site energy usage. Encouraging council members to become energy champions within their organizations which can play a significant role in achieving energy efficiency and cost savings. They recently did a study on schools and here are some key points to consider:

1. Energy -efficient practices: Implement energy-saving measures within facilities. This included upgrading to energy-efficient lighting, utilizing energy management systems optimising heating, cooling systems, and promoting responsible energy use.
2. Behavioural changes: Adopt energy-efficient behaviours such as turning off lights and equipment when not in use, using natural light and ventilation where possible, and properly maintaining equipment to maximise energy efficiency. You can read the presentation [here](#).

Justin Griggs head of policy and communications invited assembly members to share what councils are doing to tackle climate emergency.

The following points were raised:

- Cllr Whetlor reported that Somerset had conducted several events to promote climate emergency and provide training to its members part of the health and well-being programme.
- Cllr Barker reported that Kent have established a climate change advisory committee recognising the importance of addressing climate change and is taking proactive steps to tackle it. Kent intends to develop a comprehensive strategy to address climate change. Additionally, Cllr Barker encouraged members to join the CEN and highlights the availability of useful information on the WhatsApp group.

- Cllr Bradley had reported that Cumbria had secured funding to support the development of their climate change initiatives. Cllr Bradley mentioned that Cumbria is in the process of planning an event focused on climate emergency. Cumbria aims to facilitate knowledge sharing, collaboration, and learning among councils, enabling them to effectively tackle the challenges posed by the climate emergency.
- Cllr Harvey reported that BMKALC are adopting small behaviour changes to tackle climate emergency.

Justin thanked the guest speakers for making the time to attend the meeting.

Resolved: That the presentation be noted.

9. Committee issues

Management Board: The chair provided an update earlier in the meeting, please read above.

Policy Committee: Cllr Francis provided an update on Policy Committee.

- The committee working on the Levelling Up and Regeneration Bill and looking very promising.
- Committee looking at neighbourhood planning committees,
- Working on the response of the Smaller Councils Committee report

Larger Councils Committee: Cllr Harvey provided an update on the committee.

- It heard a presentation on anti-social behaviour action plan.
- Busy lobbying on extending the dependents carer's allowance to local councils.

Finance and Scrutiny Committee: Cllr Davey spoke to the summary finance report and highlighted key points from the report:

- Year result – circa £16k after allocating reserves which were available for the development project.
- 109 sale created additional pressure on cash flow and balances, additional costs on the building and upfront cost of relocating to the new office. Depending on the nature of the costs, will not affect the year end and are being discussed with auditors.
- Cash flow: He presented the figures of cash flow; he thanked assembly members for encouraging CALCs to pay affiliation fees however there are still outstanding payments due.
- Future of scrutiny: He reported that Milton Avis in the past four years have carried out independent review of NALC and currently review the structure of the committee by potentially separating scrutiny from finance.

- New reserves policy: General reserves would cover cost of closing current Pension options, redundancies, cash flow, future property needs. He thanked Steve Walker for his hard work over the past year.

Cllr Blezzard raised a query about the committee members expenses part of the budget and whether it would that be adjusted to reflect the hybrid model. Steve Walker reported that the budgets as presented had been created when expectations were different but are under review in the light of the changes and are being updated as the new ways of working are developing.

Smaller Councils Committee: Cllr Blezzard provided an update on the meeting held on 23 May 2023:

- The committee agreed to engage with county association representatives on National Assembly who are from smaller councils and invite them to participate in the committee's work, to set up a network for the smallest councils, and for NALC to promote the committee elections as early as possible.
- A representative from **Worknest** joined the meeting to get feedback, from the perspective of smaller councils, on our HR templates and how-to documents.
- A discussion also took place on the National Agreement on Terms and Pay, which the committee agreed needs review. The committee emphasized the importance of clerks of smaller councils having proper remuneration for all the hours they work. It would issue a statement to emphasize that shortly.

Full minutes of the committees can be found [here](#).

Resolved: That the reports be noted.

10. Star Councils Award 2023:

The chair encouraged assembly members to put their CALC's forward for nominations to recognise their hard work.

11. Long serving councillors:

The chair presented a request from Devon, to have NALC create a blueprint medal to honour long standing councillors.

However, some members proposed an alternative approach suggesting that the medal should focus on highlighting outstanding service to emphasize exceptional contributions and achievements rather than solely considering the length of service.

The chair indicated that NALC could assist county associations in organising the medal initiative. However, the expenses associated with creating and implementing the program would need to be covered by CALCS.

A proposal was put forward that 'NALC to suggest that CALCs handle the medal initiative.'

Assembly agreed that this was best left to county associations to consider and that county associations should be encouraged to recognise such contributions locally.

Resolved: That the proposal be not supported however It was agreed that the medal initiative be handled by county associations to consider and that county associations should be encouraged to recognise such contributions locally.

12. Date and times of next meetings:

The next meeting of the National Assembly will be held on 3 October at 10.00 a.m. via Zoom.

To note that the next face to face meeting of National Assembly on 29 November will be at the LGA, 18 Smith Square, Westminster, London, SW1P 3HZ.

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