

POLICY COMMITTEE | MINUTES

5 October 2021 –10:00-Noon

ZOOM teleconference

Present:

Cllr David Francis (committee chairman and Northumberland), Cllr Lillian Burns (Cheshire), Cllr Sue Baxter (NALC chairman and Worcestershire), Cllr Peter Allison (Yorkshire), Cllr Colin Peacock (Lancashire), Cllr Malcolm Leeding, MBE (Oxfordshire), Cllr Rosie Weaver BEM (Warwickshire and West Midlands) and Cllr Tony Hirons (Leicestershire and Rutland).

Guests in attendance: Cllr Amanda Davis (c/o Gloucestershire Association of Parish and Town Councils) for part, Cllr Eli Heathfield (c/o Gloucestershire Association of Parish and Town Councils) for part, and John Crossling (Warwickshire and West Midlands Association of Local Councils) for part.

Staff present: Justin Griggs (head of policy and communications), Chris Borg (policy manager) and Nick Howell (campaigns intern).

1. Welcome by the chairman

The committee chairman welcomed all attendees to the meeting.

2. Apologies for absence

2.1. To receive any apologies from the session

Resolved: No apologies were received for this session.

3. Minutes of previous meeting – 29 June 2021

3.1. To approve the draft minutes of the meeting held on 29 June 2021.

Resolved: The committee approved the draft minutes.

3.2. To note the action log and raise any other matters.

- (a) There was a short discussion around remote meetings and where the LGA and NALC had got to with lobbying government around legislating to make remote meetings permanent. The NALC chair advised the committee to explore whether we might seek an amendment to some other current bill, rather than seeking an entirely new act.

The policy manager summarised recent lobbying which included NALC's response to the call for evidence, engagement with meetings and officials, letter to the new secretary of state and spending review submission, as well as encouraging county associations to lobby their MPs. NALC was continuing to work with the LGA on other lobbying activity.

(b) The committee received a report from the committee vice-chair on the recent RSN online conference. Members thanked the committee vice chair for her report.

Resolved: The committee noted the action log.

4. Motions from county associations

4.1. To consider a motion from the Warwickshire and West Midlands Association of Local Councils regarding standards.

John Crossling from the Warwickshire and West Midlands Association of Local Councils spoke to a motion asking for NALC to establish a new version of the Standards Board, to be funded by all local councils in England. This body would accept and investigate referrals from Monitoring Officers (MOs), whose role would be reduced to one of undertaking an initial triage. MOs are usually given different reasons for breaches of the code by members. The number of principal authorities across county areas differs nationally. There is a need for balanced investigations and a unified process. There is a need for greater national sanctions. This matter was wider than just standards. Some MOs have had to work with several different codes.

Resolved: That WALC be asked to encourage all MOs in the county to be consistent in their investigations; that NALC engage with ADSO and the LGA to gauge levels of consistency with which MOs behave and deal with complaints; and that NALC confirms it acknowledges that inconsistent MO behaviour in investigations is a problem in some county areas.

4.2. To consider a motion from the Gloucestershire Association of Parish and Town Councils regarding livestreaming council meetings

Cllr Eli Heathfield c/o Gloucestershire Association of Parish and Town Councils spoke to a motion on asking NALC to lobby government for funding for local councils to livestream their meetings. Public engagement in the sector was being viewed in a negative light after the Handforth issue in 2020. It was straightforward for local councils to set up YouTube and Facebook accounts.

Broadband connectivity was considered to be vital. It was also considered more important that NALC lobby on virtual meetings to be reintroduced. National bandwidth was considered an issue.

Resolved: That NALC lobby for remote meetings to be reintroduced, that GAPTC be encouraged to consult its local councils on the livestreaming issue, that NALC lobbies for faster broadband nationally and that it shares good practice.

4.3. To consider a motion from the Gloucestershire Association of Parish and Town Councils regarding parish websites

Cllr Amanda Davis c/o Gloucestershire Association of Parish and Town Councils spoke to a motion on parish councils and the .Gov.uk government website. The main issue was that local councils were not even referenced on the central government .Gov.uk web domain. Michael Gove, MP had been invited to speak at the NALC Future Communities conference on 2 December. The All Party Group on Local Democracy thought that the matter had been resolved already but it had not.

Resolved: That the motion be adopted, that NALC engage with DLUHC on the matter and that NALC encourage DLUHC to ask for at least some generic web text regarding local councils to be uploaded to the .Gov.uk web domain.

4.4 To consider a motion from the Yorkshire Associations of Local Councils regarding legal classification of quad bikes

The committee chair and Cllr Allison spoke to a motion from YLCA on behalf of YLCA regarding the need to give legal classification to quad bikes for a variety of reasons. The essential problem was the need to support the amendment of current legislation to have off road quad and motorbikes included within the definitions in the Road Traffic Act 1988 to ensure they meet the legal requirements of registration, tax, MOT and insurance. This was a recognized problem in Yorkshire and nationally. Proper enforcement of what is a major antisocial problem was considered necessary. This was also supported in principle by ACPO and the LGA.

Resolved: That the motion be adopted; that NALC engage with DfT, LGA and ACPO on this issue and that NALC request the YLCA correspondence with its MPs on the issue for context.

5. Consultations update

5.1. The committee noted updates already provided in the form of a written report on the below three previously responded to consultations:

To receive a verbal update and short written report from the policy manager with a status update on responses to the following consultations:

- House of Lords inquiry into the demand for new housing.
- Cabinet Office National Resilience Strategy consultation.
- MHCLG consultation on implementation of Redmond Review.
- There was then a broader discussion on the sole live consultation current – the DEFRA consultation on Local Nature Recovery Strategies. Cllr Peacock spoke to a note he had previously circulated regarding his views based on long experience with nature fora. The current boundaries for Nature Recovery Partnerships (NRPs) were considered too disparate and the shelf life of many previous nature partnerships too transient and short. DEFRA was looking to fund them. There were 9 National Character Areas in Northumberland, 159 across England (which points to the unlikelihood that DEFRA would fund the operation of so many separate partnerships). It was necessary to know the standing of NRPs in planning. Many of these constructs did not bear relation to local ecology.

Resolved: That the report be noted and that the committee and Cllr Peacock's comments be included in the draft response to the DEFRA consultation.

6. Campaigns

Updates were briefly provided on current campaigns by the policy manager:

6.1 Banks.

The policy manager confirmed that there had been a recent meeting between NALC, UK Finance, two county associations and three high street banks regarding poor bank services for local councils. There would hopefully be a further meeting later in 2021. A focus was being put on updating a simple bank mandate form for the sector.

Resolved: That the verbal update be noted.

6.2 Local council elections surveys 2021 and to agree next steps.

The policy manager confirmed that three elections surveys issued in July had recently determined. A reasonable quantum of responses for the council, councilor and county association surveys had been received. The headline results would be analysed the following week and a short officer meeting organized to review. A short summary report containing minor comparison with the 2019 election results and headline messages, was being recommended.

Resolved: That the verbal update be noted.

6.3 Climate change – to receive a short written report on the transition of the Task and Finish Group into a national network, and the Environment Bill.

The policy manager provided a short verbal update on development of the final climate change written report summarizing headline results from the spring 2021 climate change survey. The report would be published in the same week as the NALC AGM.

Resolved: That the verbal update be noted.

6.4 Young People – to receive a short verbal update on the web page and case study document for young people.

The policy manager provided a short verbal update assisted by the campaigns intern on next steps regarding finalization of the youth case study document. The document would be published at the end of November 2021. The web text was already final.

Resolved: That the verbal update be noted.

6.5 Campaign priorities

The committee chair introduced an item reviewing the last two years and seeking views on campaign priorities for 2022-23, noting current themes of work on health and well being, climate change and young people would continue. Housing and planning, including neighbourhood planning, were proposed as further themes of work in 2022.

Resolved: That housing and planning, including neighbourhood planning, be further themes of work in 2022.

7. Review of NALC prospectus

The head of policy and communications provided a short verbal update concerning the ongoing review of the NALC prospectus. Committee members shared their comments on the proposed revised prospectus, including on options for a new title, with further comments requested to be sent to the head of policy and communications.

Resolved (1): That subject to further limited refinement, the proposed revised prospectus be supported.

- **Resolved (2):** That Cllr Malcolm Leeding be thanked for his long service to the committee (who was stepping-down from NALC involvement), Cllr Sue Baxter (whose role as NALC chairman was coming to an end) and to all committee members for their enthusiastic and pro-active contributions to NALC's policy work.

8. Date and time of next meeting

8.1. To note the next meeting of the Policy Committee will be held in January 2022 via Zoom on a date to be confirmed.

© NALC 2021