

## **POLICY COMMITTEE | MINUTES**

21 June 2022 – 11:00 – 15:00

ZOOM teleconference

### **Present:**

Cllr David Francis (committee chair and Northumberland), Cllr Lillian Burns (Cheshire), Cllr Peter Allison (Yorkshire), Cllr Colin Peacock (Lancashire), Cllr Keith Stevens (NALC chair, ex officio) and Jake Atkinson (County Officer Forum representative).

**Guests in attendance:** Shelley Parker (Society of Local Council Clerks).

**Staff present:** Justin Griggs (head of policy and communications) and Chris Borg (policy manager).

### **1. Welcome and apologies**

1.1 The committee chair welcomed all attendees to the meeting.

1.2 An apology was received from Cllr Sue Baxter for the meeting.

**Resolved:** That the apology be noted.

### **Business (A)**

#### **2.1 Motions from county associations**

The committee chair noted that there were no motions received from county associations for this session but that motions received for consideration in the future would be considered at the start of each committee meeting.

**Resolved:** That the verbal update be noted.

#### **2.2. Draft minutes of the meeting held on 15 March 2022**

The committee vice chair requested a minor grammatical change to the word “them” on the motions page of the draft minutes from the committee session on 15 March 2022. Otherwise the draft minutes from that session were approved.

**Resolved:** That subject to the word “they” in the section on county motions be amended to “them” from the draft minutes of 15 March 2022 session, and the draft minutes otherwise approved.

### 2.3. To note the action log and raise any other matters.

The committee chair asked the committee if there were any changes needed to the action log compiled since the previous committee session on 15 March 2022. There were none.

**Resolved:** That the action log be approved.

### 2.4 Fair and secure funding campaign

The policy manager summarized the headline results of the recent survey by the Funding Task and Finish Group on direct funding and other matters. 881 responses had been received in total, with just over half of Super Councils Network councils having responded. Shelley Parker, Jake Atkinson and Cllr Allison (all members of the task and finish group) fed into the discussion, welcoming early findings but agreeing that gaps in the direct funding case evidence needed to be filled.

**Resolved:** That the committee welcomes the early findings from the finance survey; that the PDF survey summary report be circulated to the committee; and that the next meeting of the group consider the survey findings and undertake further work to identify and fill any gaps and provide a further update at the meeting on 19 October 2022.

### 2.5 To receive an update on the committee's work programme 2022

The policy manager provided a short verbal update on the committee's work programme for 2022-23. Much of the work was already ongoing. However the committee was asked to be flexible with timescales due to staffing changes.

**Resolved:** That the verbal update be noted.

## **Business (B)**

### 3.1 To consider new policies on land use for adoption developed by the committee vice chair emanating from the recent response to the Lords Land Use Inquiry

The committee vice chair spoke to a written report in which it was requested that the committee adopt three sub-policies for entry and update to the policy register following the recent NALC response to a national Land Use policy consultation. There was a debate around each of the three draft sub-policies – spatial planning, rural proofing and renewable energy sources. The committee agreed to adopt the sub policies on spatial planning and rural proofing but to request consideration of

the renewable energy sources draft sub-policy at a future National Assembly session.

The committee called for the government to put in place a national planning strategy, and for it to strengthen its rural proofing work and to ensure that it embraces all relevant departments. It wanted to give further consideration to NALC policy positions on the planning aspects of renewable energy, differentiating between different renewable energy technologies, and the possible impact on different types of farmed landscape.

**Resolved:** That the committee adopt sub-policies as drafted on spatial planning and rural proofing but remain open-minded on the renewable energy sources draft sub-policy which requires further work including more research and should be considered for discussion at a future meeting of National Assembly.

### 3.2 To receive a verbal update on vacant seats on the committee

The National chair provided an update on filling committee vacancies, confirming that two new representatives to the committee – from the Dorset and Cambridgeshire county associations – had come forward to sit on the committee and that they would be considered for endorsement at the upcoming National Assembly session. Following the next assembly meeting this committee will take immediate steps to bring the new members up to speed and involve them in its work.

**Resolved:** That the Cambridgeshire and Dorset National Assembly representatives be considered for endorsement as representatives to this committee at the upcoming National Assembly session.

### 3.3 Rapid Community Initiatives government report

Shelley Parker provided an update on a report recently published by the government (“Rapid evidence review of community initiatives”). The report had been commissioned by two government departments and analysed the concept of social capital and did not recognise that local councils were a route to community delivery. This was considered to be a big gap. There was no mention made of environmental capital. After a short discussion it was agreed that the report link should be shared with the committee and any essential comments should be sent back to relevant NALC officers ahead of any letter being submitted to the government in brief response. All committee members would read and digest these documents and share their views. This was a very quick review of various academic studies and conceptualisations of ‘community initiative’.

**Resolved:** That the Rapid evidence review of community initiatives report link be circulated and the committee share further feedback on the report; and that a short response be drafted and sent to government based on feedback received.

### 3.4 We're right here report on community power

The head of policy and communications provided a short verbal update on the

We're Right Here campaign for community power supported by Big Local, Locality, New Local, Power to Change and others who are seeking a Community Power Act for direct community action and power.

There was a short discussion during which it was highlighted that local councils are statutory bodies where community groups are not. However it was agreed that if local councils are ever to be created in urban metropolitan areas NALC does need to have some engagement with the groups promoting this campaign. All committee members would read and digest these documents and share their views.

The key points of the related manifesto include: a strengthening of the Localism Act 'community rights'; the introduction of community covenants; financial support for new community governance initiatives; the establishment of a powerful commissioner to intervene within communities and to overcome bureaucratic blockages.

**Resolved:** That the link to the We're Right Here campaign for community power be circulated to the committee; and that NALC make contact with the campaign organisers.

## **Business (C)**

### 4.1 Sustainable Communities Act

The policy manager spoke to a short-written report regarding local council proposals under the Sustainable Communities Act. The report set out a number of issues and concerns such as non-response, delay and lack of adherence to the Sustainable Communities Act Regulations 2012 by the Department of Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC formerly MHCLG) which needed to be addressed if the proposal process was to recover and work more effectively in the future. The committee noted that NALC had already written to the secretary of state but not received a response.

There was a broad discussion during which it was agreed that whilst these issues should be raised with the government, it was also an opportunity to improve awareness of the Act within the local council sector, wider local government and within government.

The most recent proposal submitted under the Act was from Weymouth Town Council to ask the government to grant local councils the same rights to use of the Dependants' Carers' Allowance as principal authorities.

**Resolved:** That NALC meet with DLUHC officials to highlight recent issues with the government's handling of local council proposals under the Act; that SCA be discussed at a future fortnightly meeting with county officers; and that proposals be developed setting out options for increasing awareness of the Act and ways to improve the current process, guidance and support.

#### 4.2 Campaigns / big themes update

The policy manager provided an update on the climate change, youth and Make A Change campaigns, which were ongoing.

The head of policy and communications provided a short update on national networks confirming that they are a way of sharing good practice amongst participants and not an attempt to bypass the Policy Committee.

**Resolved:** That the verbal updates be noted; that NALC provide updated information to the committee and county associations on numbers of National Network members by county area.

#### 4.3 Levelling Up and Regeneration Bill – drill down on neighbourhood governance review

The head of policy and communications provided a verbal update that the Levelling Up and Regeneration Bill had passed second reading on the Commons on 8 June. NALC had had some interest from its issued parliamentary briefing at that stage. However the neighbourhood governance review promised in the white paper had not since emerged in the bill for which reason it was considered prescient to be organising a further special session of the committee over the summer and for a previously circulated paper on new council creation to be considered there, ahead of submission to the relevant bill team.

**Resolved:** That the verbal update be noted; and that a special meeting of the committee be organised over the summer in which the previously circulated

positions paper on new council creation be considered to inform further engagement with the government on the neighbourhood governance review.

#### 4.4 Consultations update

The policy manager confirmed that NALC had drafted, submitted and promoted responses to the below three consultations in recent months:

- Lord Inquiry into Climate Change.
- Lords Inquiry into Land Use.
- Landscapes Review.

**Resolved:** That the written report be noted.

#### 4.5 To receive a list of policy referrals from the Smaller Councils Committee meeting of 24 May 2022

The committee vice chair spoke to a full paper sent to the committee summarising the results of a recent survey of smaller councils commissioned by the Smaller Councils Committee. There was a request for the policy issues of virtual meetings to continue to be pressed and for simplified templates to be created / used for smaller councils as a result of the survey results. The Committee noted that the Management Board would be considering the report and its proposals at their next meeting.

The committee noted that the Management Board would be considering the paper on 5 July, and there was strong support for the simplified templates for smaller councils.

**Resolved:** That the committee vice chair be thanked for her full and comprehensive report summarising the results of the recent smaller councils survey; that the paper be referred for consideration to county associations, Management Board, National Assembly and the Governance Review task and finish group.

#### 4.6 To confirm a replacement for Cllr Burns to act as the NALC representative to the Rural Services Network

It was confirmed that in due course the committee vice chair wished to stand down as the representative to the Rural Services Network (RSN). It was considered that filling this position was best referred to Management Board and

National Assembly, though Cllr Burns agreed to continue at the next session, as the NALC representative.

**Resolved:** That Cllr Burns be thanked for her service as NALC representative to the RSN and that filling the upcoming vacancy should be referred to Management Board and National Assembly.

## **5. Date and time of next meeting**

5.1. To note the next meeting of the Policy Committee will be held at 10:00 a.m. on Wednesday 19 October 2022 via Zoom. © NALC 2022