

## **SMALLER COUNCILS COMMITTEE | DRAFT MINUTES**

Meeting of the NALC Smaller Councils Committee held by Zoom teleconference on 28 September 2021.

### **Present:**

National assembly members: Cllr Bob Blezzard, Cllr Lillian Burns, Cllr Graham Ford (committee chairman), Cllr Malcolm Leeding MBE; directly elected members: Cllr Josephine Parish (committee vice-chairman), Mr Stephen Rickitt

### **Also in attendance:**

Also present were Anders Hanson (projects manager), Claire Fitzgerald (admin manager) for part, Lisa Etchell (projects officer), Jessica Lancod-Frost (policy officer), Justin Griggs (head of policy and communications), Mike Drew (NALC vice-chair) and Nick Howell (campaigns intern).

### **1. Apologies and welcome**

No apologies for absence were received.

### **2. Minutes of the previous meeting and action log**

The committee approved the minutes of the previous meeting.

The committee vice chairman talked through the action log.

Comments raised in response included:

- The policy officer apologised that the action relating to leave of absence was still outstanding
- The policy officer confirmed that information on the size and geographical spread of councils that entered NALC's Star Council Awards had been circulated to the committee
- The project manager confirmed that he would be providing updates on the Local Council Award Scheme and E-Learning under item five of the agenda

**Resolved (1):** That the minutes of the meeting held on 22 June 2021 are approved

### **3. Policy and communications update**

The campaigns intern introduced himself and reminded committee members about NALC's election surveys.

The campaigns intern also confirmed that he was working on setting up a climate change network and analysing previous climate change survey data.

**Resolved (1):** That the committee welcomes the campaigns intern to NALC.

### **4. Governance update**

The admin manager gave an overview of the 2021 Smaller Councils Committee elections as follows:

- The committee is made up of five National Assembly members and three directly elected members. The directly elected members can be clerks, councillors or county officers working with smaller councils
- Every member of the committee will stand down this year
- The nominations process is now open. Anyone wishing to stand for election should complete a nomination form and return it to the committees inbox by 25 October
- Voting in the direct elections will take place between 10 November and 6 December
- Voting in the National Assembly elections will take place between 22 November and 6 December
- The results of both elections will be announced on 8 December, with elected candidates taking up their place in January 2022

The admin manager encouraged all committee members to stand for election and to get the message out to people they believe may be interested in standing.

Comments raised in response included:

- The committee requested a representative on management board, which it has at the moment by chance, however what happens when that is no longer the case?
- The admin manager confirmed that the package of requests the committee had put to Management Board would be considered as part of the wider governance review

- Asking for two extra elected members was a compromise, but still vastly inadequate given the number of smaller councils
- Would it be possible to have two extra members before the governance review and could the governance review be used to strengthen the connection between smaller councils and NALC?
- The Larger Councils Committee has eighteen members and there are hundreds of large councils overall, yet the Smaller Councils Committee has only eight members despite there being thousands of smaller councils.
- Under the current rules the committee could end up with no directly elected members being councillors
- The vast majority of councils within NALC are deemed to be smaller, so the vast majority of what NALC does is aimed at them
- It would be interesting to see an analysis of the size of councils on national assembly

**Resolved (1):** That the update on elections be noted.

## **5. Member services update**

The projects officer introduced herself and informed the committee that she would be working on the Local Council Award Scheme and providing support to the Improvement and Development Board.

The projects manager gave an update on the Local Council Award Scheme as follows:

- Round two of the awards was nearly concluded, all panels had met over the last couple of weeks
- The projects manager was now in the process of bringing the report together and informing councils of the outcome
- Twenty two councils had submitted applications in the second round and eight panels had met
- Each panel consisted of a mix of councillors and clerks
- A mix of large and small councils had applied, with councils going for different levels of the award
- Information on outcomes would be provided for the next committee meeting
- The deadline for the third round is now 8 October
- So far eight councils have applied, of these four are considered smaller, three are applying for quality, one for foundation. The projects manager was aware of more councils that were likely to apply

- The projects manager was holding sessions at the Devon and Lincolnshire county association conferences to promote the award scheme

An update on E-Learning was also provided as follows:

- One county association was potentially looking to play a greater part in E-Learning
- Breakthrough Communications was still working on their modules, NALC hadn't received them yet
- E-Learning would be rolled out more widely at the end of November

The committee chairman asked members if they had any comments on the extension of the scope of the local government and social care ombudsman, as this would impact smaller councils.

Comments raised in response included:

- It was a crazy idea as it would give the disaffected a stick to beat with
- The ombudsman would struggle to resource responses
- For the ombudsmen to be open to every council it would need to employ thousands more people

The head of policy and communications clarified that extending the jurisdiction of the ombudsmen was long standing NALC policy. If members wanted NALC to reconsider this position, they would need to talk to their county association or the new committee might want to consider it next year.

The head of policy and communications also confirmed that the ombudsmen was engaging with NALC in a number of areas as part of a tri annual review.

The head of policy and communications informed the committee that the NALC chairman would be attending and giving a speech at the SLCC conference in October and that he would be accompanying the chairman at the conference.

The projects manager confirmed that staff contact details were available on the NALC website and that NALC was in the process of redesigning it.

**Resolved (1):** That the committee welcomes the projects officer to NALC.

**Resolved (2):** That the updates from the projects manager on the Local Council Award Scheme and E-Learning be noted.

## **6. NALC civility work**

### **NALC civility work**

The national vice chairman (member services) and head of policy and communications gave an update on the work of the Civility in Public Life Project Working Group and its most recent meeting:

- A statement from the working group had been published which the Committee was encouraged to read and be aware of
- A project officer had been appointed and will start next week
- The latest edition of NALC's LCR magazine includes an article on the project by the chairman of the SLCC
- The working group had developed a work programme of projects and activities including promoting the national model member code of conduct and existing resources such as the good governance checklist, supporting lobbying to change the standards regime and the development of new guidance, templates and policies
- A local resolution protocol had been identified as quick win and was among the guidance being developed with input from Hoey Ainscough Associates who attended the recent meeting
- Recruitment of clerks had been raised by county associations and the working group as a current issue
- A logo and branding for the working group was being developed by the SLCC
- The Committee provided feedback on the practicalities of staffing committees for smaller local councils especially those with only five councillors

**Resolved (1):** That the update on NALC's civility work be welcomed.

## **7. Committee chairman's report**

The committee chairman spoke to a report he had written covering the future role of the committee.

Cllr Bob Blezzard stressed the importance of pursuing two additional committee members and securing a place for the committee chairman on Management Board.

Cllr Malcolm Leeding called for the new committee to identify the particular skills, experience and expertise of members.

Cllr Josephine Parish emphasised the need for qualitative data, longer meetings, better representation for smaller councils and a stronger line of communication.

**Resolved (1):** That the committee endorses the report, conducts a detailed skills audit of new members and recommends that new committee members use to its fullest extent the power to coopt supplementary (albeit nonvoting) members with a view to balancing its base.

**Date and time of next meeting**

Tuesday 23 November at 10:00am by Zoom teleconference.