

SMALLER COUNCILS COMMITTEE | DRAFT MINUTES

Meeting of the Smaller Councils Committee held by Zoom teleconference on 2 March at 10.00.

Present:

National Assembly members: Cllr Lillian Burns, Cllr Mike Drew (national vice chair, member services), Cllr Graham Ford (committee chair); directly elected members: Cllr Bob Blezzard, Cllr Josephine Parish (committee vice-chair).

Staff present:

Chris Borg (policy manager), Anders Hanson (projects manager, member services); Jessica Lancod-Frost (policy officer), (head of policy and communications), Jane Moore (Senior solicitor and head of member services).

1. Apologies

No apologies for absence were received.

2. Minutes of previous meetings

The committee approved the minutes of the two previous meetings (28 September and 20 December).

The committee chairman asked if there were any matters arising. Matters raised in response included:

The head of member services confirmed that NALC was still pressing for local councils to be able to hold hybrid meetings.

3. Committee work programme for 2022/23

The committee discussed how to take forward the work programme for 2022/3.

Cllr Lillian Burns suggested that the committee write to smaller councils, asking what issues of relevance to them they would like the committee to address and what services they would like NALC to provide.

A discussion then took place, in which the following points were raised:

- Local councils need to be reminded/made aware that the committee exists
- The letter ought to contain the topics already suggested by the committee and the head of policy and communications and would need to be distributed to smaller councils by county associations
- A member of the climate emergency network is developing a scheme of training on carbon literacy specifically for local councils
- NALC would use an existing email address to receive replies to the letter
- Could NALC write to chairs and county association representatives, as well as clerks?
- It would be useful for the committee to have a county association observer

Resolved (1): The committee to write to smaller councils to ask what issues of relevance to them they would like the committee to address and the services they would like NALC to provide and Cllr Lillian Burns to take the lead in analysing the responses.

4. Member services update

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

- The award scheme was currently between the triage and panel stage
- Panels would be taking place in April
- An internal review was underway to make the process more streamlined and effective

The projects manager agreed to source the electorate figures of the smaller councils that had applied.

Resolved (1): That the update from the project officer member services be noted.

Resolved (2): The committee to actively promote and support the Local Council Award Scheme.

5. NALC civility update

The senior solicitor and head of member services provided an update on the Civility in Public Life Project Group. The group consists of six workstreams: including governance and training. The governance workstream was in the process of revising guidance on the code of conduct with Hoey Ainscough. The workstreams have continued to meet regularly, with the wider project group meeting monthly.

The group had identified the need for county association involvement in the governance workstream and county associations had now been invited to provide input on documents.

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

6. NALC Star Council Awards

The policy manager gave an update on NALC's Star Council Awards. The awards were launched on 28 February and the categories remained the same as last year. Some changes were going to be made to the judging process, including having a different judging panel for each category. An online ceremony would take place later in the year.

The committee was asked to help promote the awards to smaller councils. A communication pack would be circulated to help with this.

Committee members were asked if there was anything else that would encourage smaller councils to apply to the awards. Suggestions were given as follows:

- Separate categories for smaller and larger councils
- A financial incentive
- National recognition for the winners, possibly by getting the Lord Lieutenant involved

The head of policy and communications confirmed that NALC would look at having separate categories for smaller and larger councils next year. There was a need to be mindful of the upcoming governance review and ongoing debate about the definition of a smaller council. NALC would add the Lord Lieutenants to the list of contacts to send the communication pack to.

Resolved (1): That the update on the Star Council Awards be noted.

Resolved (2): The committee to actively promote and support the Star Council Awards.

Resolved (3): NALC to consider the above suggestions for attracting more entries from smaller councils when designing next year's awards.

7. Local council elections and NALC Make A Change Campaign

The policy manager spoke to a summary of NALC's 2021 local council elections report and provided an overview of the areas that were due to hold elections in 2022.

The head of policy and communications asked what NALC needed to do to get more and different people interested in their communities and standing for election and what part committee members and county associations could play.

Committee members made suggestions as follows:

- Promotion of next year's elections should start this Autumn
- Social media should be used to highlight the existence of smaller local councils and the local council elections that are taking place in 2023
- Councils should set out their five year or one year plan when encouraging candidates to come forward
- District Councils should fund the cost of holding an election or the marginal cost in all out elections
- The percentage of the electorate required to call an election should increase

The policy manager confirmed that NALC was currently consolidating and updating documents for the 2022 elections. A review process for the 2023 elections would take place over summer, NALC would be seeking feedback from committee members to inform this work.

The policy manager asked committee members to make sure their county association had responded to the campaigns intern's call for information.

The head of policy and communications emphasised the need for existing councillors to engage with people who care about issues such as the climate

emergency and local services and encourage them to come forward stand for election.

Resolution (1): That the update on NALC's elections work be noted.

Resolution (2): That NALC's promotion of the 2023 local council elections be commenced with enough forward notice and that NALC explores the option of using paid for social media advertisements.

8. Date and time of next meeting

The committee discussed the merits of holding the next meeting in person and decided that given the circumstances it should take place by Zoom.

24 May 2022 at 10:00am by Zoom.