

SMALLER COUNCILS COMMITTEE | AGENDA

19 July 2022

10:00-12:00 (at 11:00 there will be a short break for 10 minutes)

Please find joining details below:

Zoom teleconference:

Join Zoom Meeting

<https://us06web.zoom.us/j/86948198166?pwd=M3UvT2ltZFdzdEtzcnA4b1BJVnUvZz09>

Meeting ID: 869 4819 8166

Passcode: 750267

To submit an apology for this meeting please email
NALCcommittees@nalc.gov.uk or call 020 7637 1865.

1. Apologies and welcome

- 1.1. To note any apologies.

Verbally at
the meeting

2. Minutes of previous meeting

- 2.1. To approve the minutes of the meeting held on 24 May 2022 and to note any matters arising and other items not covered elsewhere on the agenda.
- 2.2. To note the actions completed since the meeting held on 24 May 2022, in the action log.

Appendices
2.1 – 2.2

3. NALC online events

- 3.1. To note the outcome of NALC's online events and in particular the recent event on reviewing neighbourhood plans.
- 3.2. To offer suggestions for future event topics (to take place next financial year).

Appendix
3.1

4. Letter to smaller councils

- 4.1. To consider Management Board's response to the survey of smaller councils and associated reports.

Appendix
4.1

5. Update from the committee chairman

- 5.1. To receive an update from the committee chairman concerning e-learning initiatives.

Verbally, at
the meeting

6. Date and time of next meeting

- 6.1. To note that the next meeting of the Smaller Councils Committee will be held on 11 October 2022 starting at 10:00am, location to be confirmed.

AGENDA ITEM 2 – SMALLER COUNCILS COMMITTEE – TUESDAY 19 JULY 2022

Appendix 2.1 – Draft minutes of meeting 24 May 2022

Meeting of the Smaller Councils Committee held by Zoom teleconference on 24 May at 10.00.

Present:

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

Staff present:

Chris Borg (policy manager, for part), Jessica Lancod-Frost (policy officer), (head of policy and communications), Jonathan Owen (chief executive, for part).

1. Apologies

No apologies for absence were received.

2. Minutes of previous meetings

The committee was asked to agree the minutes of the previous meeting.

Cllr Bob Blezzard indicated that he had been incorrectly listed as a directly elected member.

The committee approved the minutes of the meeting on 2 March 2022.

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

The chief executive provided an update on the filling of committee vacancies. Overall there were two vacancies on the Smaller Councils Committee, one on Policy Committee and one on Finance Committee and four expressions of interest

had been received. Various discussions with the candidates were now taking place.

The chief executive confirmed that the campaign to encourage more prospective councillors to stand for election was ongoing.

Resolved (1): That minutes of meeting held on 2 March 2022 are approved.

3. Letter to smaller councils

Cllr Lillian Burns introduced her report analysing responses to the letter to smaller councils. Over 100 responses had been received from smaller councils all over England.

The exercise had raised the profile of the Smaller Councils Committee and made smaller councils aware the committee was there for them.

The committee hoped that NALC's Management Board would consider the report and ways forward, as most of the issues were relevant to local councils of all sizes.

However, these issues were felt more acutely by smaller councils, who were looking for help from NALC in a variety of shapes and forms. Therefore, the committee hoped that more officer time could be devoted to supporting smaller councils.

The chief executive asked the committee to decide what the most important points were and to take them to NALC's Management Board. NALC was already working on some of the areas mentioned, whilst a few areas were for County Associations to develop into a motion.

The committee vice chair thanked Cllr Lillian Burns for the work she had put into writing her report. The exercise had identified several issues and NALC needed to lobby government for more resources to support smaller councils.

A discussion then took place on the definition of a smaller council, in which the following points were raised:

- The current definition needs redefining - councils like Sandown Town Council with a precept of £355,000 are currently classified as a smaller council

- Work to redefine the definition should be looked at on a regional basis – Cllr Blezzard would consider asking SERCAF to look at it when the group next met
- A review of the definition would also need to go to the Constitutional Task and Finish Group
- The committee vice chairman expressed concern that if the definition of a smaller council was set to those councils with a precept of lower than £25,000, this would create a middle level of councils that didn't feel represented by initiatives for larger councils
- Cllr Burns said that if the definition was to alter, there needed to be a proper case put forward for any alternative criteria.

The committee chair suggested that the Smaller Councils Committee should increase in size, to include one representative from each region as part of a directly elected contingent.

Cllr Bob Blezzard supported the committee chair's proposal that the committee should increase in size. Cllr Blezzard also proposed that the National Assembly contingent should be reduced to three directly elected members, with the directly elected contingent increasing to eight members (one from each region).

Cllr Josephine Parish also called for the committee to retain the power to coopt members.

Resolved (1): That the committee requests, as a matter of urgency, that the Constitutional Task and Finish Group addresses the definition of smaller and other local councils and provides justification for any changes made to the definition.

Resolved (2): That membership of the Smaller Councils Committee should be expanded to include three national Assembly members and eight directly elected members – one from each region, the committee chair to sit on Management Board and the committee to retain the power to coopt members based on strengths.

The committee then had a discussion and made resolutions based on the recommendations set out in Cllr Lillian Burns report as follows:

Resolved (3): The committee noted it was already NALC policy to push for local councils to be able to hold hybrid meetings, however it was agreed to ask NALC's President Baroness Scott to lobby further on this.

Resolved (4): When local councils are allowed to hold hybrid meetings, the committee to ask NALC to produce a guidance note on how hybrid meetings should be run.

Resolved (5): That County Associations should help local councils in keeping two way communication open during the change over period ahead of the change to unitary councils.

Resolved (6): That it should still be mandatory for local councils to hold an annual parish meeting.

Resolved (7): The committee to ask Finance and Scrutiny Committee to ask NALC leadership to investigate the feasibility of setting up a legal aid fund for smaller councils.

Resolved (8): The committee to refer the points in the report on planning and relations with principal authorities to Policy Committee.

Resolved (9): The committee to put in a request to Management Board for NALC to set up a task and finish group to comment on planning policies that it wants included in the Levelling Up Bill.

Resolved (10): That the committee strongly supports the recommendation that NALC employs a planning consultant.

Resolved (11): For Management Board and NALC's Legal Team to consider the requests to produce a range of template documents for smaller councils and the model documents in the appendix of Cllr Lillian Burn's report.

Resolved (12): The committee to request NALC signposts councils to the resources on devolution of services.

Resolved (13): The committee to request that NALC creates more networks on an as needed basis (this could include a temporary network on planning) and for more resources to help facilitate this.

Resolved (14): The committee to request that potential incentives for joining the Local Council Award Scheme are reviewed, with the possibility of financial incentives for smaller councils in future.

Resolved (15): The committee to have a future agenda item on the local council award scheme criteria, as requiring two thirds of councillors to be elected is impeding many local councils from applying.

Resolved (16): The committee to put forward a suggestion to Management Board that NALC produces a briefing document for banks.

Resolved (17): The committee agreed that all documents being developed for local councils should be tabled before the smaller councils committee and larger councils committee prior to publication.

Resolved (18): That NALC finds out which County Associations are offering remote training and publicises those sessions.

Resolved (19): For the committee to find out whether any schemes offering small pots of highways funding to local councils exist.

Resolved (20): The committee to request more officer time is devoted to supporting smaller councils.

Resolved (21): The committee agreed to write to regional associations to find out if the points raised by one or two smaller councils amounted to more than a passing interest.

On a number of issues, such as the suggestion that NALC should have 'champions' for specific issues, the committee did not get around to considering them at the meeting. The committee hopes to come back to them at the first opportunity.

4. Date and time of next meeting

19 July 2022 at 10:00am by Zoom.

AGENDA ITEM 2 – SMALLER COUNCILS COMMITTEE – TUESDAY 19 JULY 2022

Appendix 2.2 – Smaller Councils Committee Action Log

Smaller Councils Committee

24 May 2022	Minutes of previous meeting and action log ACTION: That the minutes of the meeting held on 2 March are approved.	2	Y
24 May 2022	Letter to smaller councils ACTION: That the Constitutional Task and Finish Group addresses the definition of smaller and other local councils and provides justification for any changes made to the definition.	3	With Management Board
24 May 2022	Letter to smaller councils ACTION: That membership of the Smaller Councils Committee should be expanded to include three national Assembly members and eight directly elected members – one from each region, the committee chair to sit on Management Board and the committee to retain the power to coopt members based on strengths.	3	With Management Board

24 May 2022	Letter to smaller councils ACTION: Resolutions 3 to 20 of the Smaller Councils Committee minutes from 24 May 2022	3	With Management Board
24 May 2022	Letter to smaller councils ACTION: The committee to write to regional associations to find out if the points raised by one or two smaller councils amounted to more than a passing interest.	3	N

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AGENDA ITEM 3 – SMALLER COUNCILS COMMITTEE – TUESDAY 19 JULY 2022

Appendix 3.1 – Review of NALC Online Events 2022

Review of NALC Online Events in 2022 so far

1. Levelling up the Nation and Our Communities
Number of tickets sold: 104
2. Working Together To Make Communities Safer
Number of tickets sold: 46
3. Fighting Climate Change
Number of tickets sold: 223
4. How to Review Neighbourhood Planning Policies
Number of tickets sold: 273

Suggestions for future event topics:

Delegates attending NALC's online events have been invited to suggest topics for future events via the feedback form. Suggestions received so far this year include:

- Climate change, including:
 - biodiversity food and farming
 - environmental initiatives for local councils e.g. charging points, solar panels, wind turbines
 - how to respond to climate change
 - carbon literacy and more pointers on what local councils can do
- Creating new local councils in urban areas
- Elections
- Emergency plans and how they fit with national/regional requirements and the role of town councils in supporting them
- Facilitating and funding community projects
- Financing and grant applications
- HR for local councils
- How councils can use the General Power of Competence
- How to manage parking issues

- Interlinking of mental health and community safety
- Media for local council updates on legislation
- Planning and development, including:
 - focusing on tension between government policy changes and established policy and guidance
 - planning authority remit on the 3/5yr supply and how that affects parish and neighbourhood plans; national planning legislation – current and any proposed changes
 - the role of local councils in reviewing planning applications – who listens and should there be more local powers
 - interaction between local council and District Council
- Local council representation on outside bodies and the role of agencies such as county associations
- Procurement using the required platform/practical down to earth training on tendering
- Standards, particularly councillor to councillor conduct

The Smaller Councils Committee is invited to suggest further topics to be considered for future NALC and county association events to be held in the next financial year.

AGENDA ITEM 4 – SMALLER COUNCILS COMMITTEE – TUESDAY 19 JULY 2022

Appendix 4.1 – Letter to Smaller Councils

Feedback from Management Board 5 July 2022

Management board met in person on 5 July and agreed to recommend to National Assembly that Cllr Sue Lintern (Norfolk) and Cllr Mick Baker (Nottinghamshire) be appointed to the Smaller Councils Committee.

The board noted the quarterly performance report which includes the latest membership numbers per county association. The Smaller Councils Committee may consider how best to increase take up in those areas with low membership, often the smallest councils.

The board considered the notes of the meeting of the governance task and finish group held in May and June. The conclusions so far have been reported to National Assembly and further meetings are planned. Cllr Blezzard expressed concerns at the lack of progress if a report was to be made to the AGM. The chief executive reported that only constitutional amendments technically need to be reported to the AGM and confirmed that the proposal to move to a single transferable vote for committee etc. elections would be considered at the AGM.

Cllr Burns attended remotely to present the conclusions of the Smaller Councils Committee survey and answer questions. There were technical difficulties which interrupted at times, but a useful and informative session was held. She was thanked for her work and the survey highlighted a number of areas that were either already being progressed (e.g. lobbying for remote meetings to continue) or needed further consideration. Management Board agreed to ask Cllr Francis and Cllr Drew to consider the proposals further and report back.