

SMALLER COUNCILS COMMITTEE | DRAFT MINUTES

Meeting of the Smaller Councils Committee held by Zoom teleconference at 10:00 on 13 February 2024.

Attendees:

National Assembly members – Councillors Alan Neal, Allan Blakemore, Marcus Allen (committee chair) Mick Baker, David Francis (NALC vice-chair, member services), Directly elected members: Cllr John Cowan, Stephen Ashfield, Vanessa Lowe (committee vice-chair).

Also in attendance:

Charlotte Eisenhart (head of member services), Chris Borg (policy manager), Jessica Lancod-Frost (policy officer), Justin Griggs (head of policy and communications) Jonathan Owen (chief executive).

1. Minutes of previous meetings

Resolved: That the draft minutes of the meetings held on 10 October 2023 and 18 December 2023 be approved.

2. Member services update

The head of member services gave an overview of the work of NALC's member services team. A review of the Local Council Award Scheme (LCAS) criteria was currently underway, committee members could input by filling in the [online form](#) by Friday 29 March. Further information was available from Anders Hanson, member services manager, at Anders.Hanson@nalc.gov.uk.

Resolved (1): That the update be noted and committee members input to the review of the LCAS criteria via the [online form](#).

3. Financial resilience

Mark Mullberry of Mulberry and Co and the Internal Audit Forum (IAF) set out changes to section four of the Joint Panel on Accountability and Governance (JPAG) Practitioners Guide that would see local (parish and town) councils encouraged to publish their full internal audit report on their websites, although it

would not be made mandatory at this stage. Mark advised that the need to improve audit quality at the smallest local councils could be communicated through incremental changes and forums, that internal auditors should talk to councils, finance chairs, clerks and responsible financial officers and that internal audit reports should start with engagement letters and plans.

The committee was also informed that JPAG documents were designed to be used by councils of all sizes and that councils could find an internal auditor through the IAF (which NALC was in partnership with and had helped establish) and their county association.

Resolved (1): That the update from Mark Mullbery on changes to the Practitioners Guide be noted.

Resolved (2): That the JPAG project manager be invited to attend a future meeting.

Resolved (3): The committee to consider whether it wants the new financial regulations on a future agenda.

4. Co-options

The chief executive outlined the co-options process. Up to four members could optionally be co-opted and the committee was advised to consider diversity and skills when doing so. The committee considered benefits of co-opting a county officer, including the regular contact they would have with other county officers and their good grasp of smaller councils.

Resolved (1): That the committee asks the County Officers Forum to put forward a county officer to be co-opted onto the Smaller Councils Committee.

Resolved (2): That the Smaller Councils Committee conducts a skills audit and decides whether to make additional co-options at its next meeting.

5. Committee workplan 2024 and 2025

The policy officer spoke to the draft committee workplan for 2024 and 2025 which included opportunities for smaller councils to input to work NALC was currently undertaking.

Resolved (1): That setting up a micro council network be added to the draft workplan for 2024-25 and the workplan be recommended to Management Board.

Resolved (2): That setting up a micro council network, young people, health and wellbeing, climate change, community safety and financial resilience be priorities for the committee to focus on in 2024-25.

6. Martyn's Law Steering Group

The policy manager invited expressions of interest in the role of committee representative on the Martyn's Law Steering Group. The representative would attend Zoom calls every 6-8 weeks, comment on drafts of documents and update the committee as needed.

Resolved (1): That Vanessa Lowe and Cllr Allan Blakemore be elected Smaller Councils Committee representatives on the Martyn's Law Steering Group.

7. Rural Services Network

The policy officer invited expressions of interest in the role of NALC representative at the Rural Services Network (RSN). The representative would attend monthly online seminars and the RSN's annual conference, as well as engaging with NALC before and after each meeting.

Resolved (1): That Cllr Marcus Allen be elected NALC representative on the RSN, with Cllr Alan Neal deputising when Cllr Allen is unable to attend meetings.

8. Local Council Award Scheme Criteria Review

The head of member services added that an increase in the number of local councils taking part meant there was more need for the criteria to be updated.

Resolved: That members of the Smaller Councils Committee promote the LCAS criteria review to smaller councils in their networks.

9. Date and time of next meeting

16 April at 11:00am (ending at 15:00pm) in Meeting Room 9, The Bloomsbury Building, 10 Bloomsbury Way, Holborn, London. WC1A 2SL.