

ELCR

The official magazine of the National Association of Local Councils

SPRING
2020

LOUD AND CLEAR
HOW NALC IS PUSHING
THE SECTOR'S AGENDA
WITH THE GOVERNMENT

YOUR SAY
WAYS TO ENCOURAGE
MORE CANDIDACY AT
LOCAL ELECTIONS

LAST WORD
CORONAVIRUS: WHO WILL
EMERGE AS A SHINING
EXAMPLE IN HAVING
IMPROVED PEOPLE'S LIVES

LEGAL SURGERY
CAN YOU SMOKE IN A
COUNCIL-OWNED CAR?

A LCAS STORY
WHY ATTAINING THE
AWARD WAS CRUCIAL
FOR ONE COUNCIL

THE BIG THEMES

Highlights of the
sector's work on
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Welcome

Firstly, I hope that you and your family are keeping safe and well at this time. I know these are challenging times for everyone, so I wanted to take a moment to share some positive news. Right now, it is vital to shine a light on all the good that is happening.

Across England, our fantastic councils and county associations have been showing real leadership by galvanising their staff and volunteers to look after the most vulnerable in their communities. They have been organising emergency action plans, collecting and delivering shopping and medication and donating funds and food to their local food banks. Others have set up support groups and buddy systems. Many have been collaborating with other local (parish and town) councils, principal authorities and third sector organisations to ensure a coordinated effort. You can read just a few examples in our special coronavirus section on pages 24 and 25. But if you would like to see more, we have gathered around 350 case studies for a special publication, which you can read on our coronavirus webpage. Additionally, as you help your communities we want you and your staff to be as safe as possible, so on page 23, you can find tips on how to manage your volunteers.

It has been heartening to see how we have all embraced remote working – it shows how easily we can connect and how adaptive we can be! Perhaps this is one of the positive things we can continue after the lockdown has ended. In the meantime, if the novelty of working at home is starting to wear off, the advice on page 26 will help keep the momentum going.

Also, be sure to check out our other articles, including the inspirational stories from our councils on youth engagement and the climate change emergency, and the comprehensive round-up of what you all believe needs to be done to encourage more candidates to stand for local election.

At this hectic time, I encourage you to take a break and flip through the next 18 articles. You might find the inspiration needed to tackle a new project, or perhaps a tip will come in handy at just the right time, making your life easier.

And do stay safe and well.

Jonathan Owen
chief executive



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Contents

SECTOR SPOTLIGHT

- 07 Loud and clear**
An update on how NALC is ensuring the local council voice is being heard by the new government
- 09 Council focus**
Star Council Awards finalist, Salisbury City Council talks about the projects it undertakes for its residents
- 11 County watch**
How the Warwickshire and West Midlands Association of Local Councils worked to inject new blood into its councils
- 12 From dawn to dusk**
Star Councils' Young Councillor of the Year, Cllr Daniel Thomas, takes us through his busy monthly schedule
- 15 A LCAS story**
How the Local Council Award Scheme (LCAS) has been beneficial to Worcestershire's Pershore Town Council

FEATURES

- 17 The big themes**
We take a look at the work the sector is doing on NALC's three chosen priorities for 2020
- 22 Coronavirus special**
As the pandemic changes our daily lives, we give some practical tips on staying safe and homeworking, and highlight the good work local councils are doing
- 28 Harnessing the power of mobile**
Gareth Elliot of Mobile UK explains how it is working to help solve the rural mobile coverage problem
- 30 Obituary**
Cara Stobart of the Devon Association of Local Councils looks back on the life of Lesley Smith MBE

YOUR VIEWS

- 32 Your say**
In a sector-wide survey, we asked: what can be done to encourage more candidacy at local council elections?

ADVICE & GUIDANCE

- 36 Legal surgery**
What is the legislation around smoking in council-owned vehicles? NALC senior solicitor and legal services manager, Jane Moore, looks into this for you
- 38 Risk management tips for managing volunteers**
Brian Brookes of BHIB Insurance Brokers says it is crucial to have robust volunteer management processes
- 40 Moving to web accessibility**
As new laws on website accessibility come into force this year, Cllr Mark Harris of Cirencester Town Council explains how to approach the new requirements

AND FINALLY...

- 42 Last word**
Jonathan Werran, chief executive at Localis, looks at who will shine out as an example to follow once the coronavirus crisis ends

Improving Services by using the Cloud

Chris Edge, Managing Director of EDGE IT Systems Ltd

How can the Cloud improve your services?

The Cloud provides the opportunity for Local Councils to provide more innovative services, because Cloud based applications can power website pages and mobile phone apps.

Examples include the following that are accessible 24x7 and support officers during busy working hours as well as during evenings and weekends:

- Bookings and enquiries
- Complaints
- Workforce job management
- Workforce timesheets
- Payment approval by Councillors

Why move to the Cloud?

In 2019 anybody with a smart phone is using the Cloud whether they know it or not. The Cloud simplifies GDPR compliance and provides powerful servers that drive the apps that we use for banking, shopping and keeping in touch with everybody.

Traditionally Local Councils have purchased software, installed it on their computers, saved their files locally and been responsible for their own backups.

This traditional "onsite" type of IT installation requires more IT investment, officer management, IT support and more frequent IT upgrades than a Cloud based solution.

With the Cloud, you simply need an internet connection and a basic, virus free device to connect to the Cloud. Everything else is provided by the servers in the Cloud.

Cloud software can look and feel like normal Windows applications, or it can be web based and operated from a web browser. At EDGE we still prefer to provide powerful, no compromise Windows applications for Local Councils just like we have been for 27 years,

albeit we have been delivering them via the Cloud for the last 13 years.

The monthly or annual subscription for Cloud software ensures that you are always on the latest version. Also, each licensed user is allowed to operate the Cloud software on any devices that they normally use, e.g. laptop, desktop, tablet and smart phone, be these at work or at home. Cloud software is also known as "software as a service" or SaaS.

Crucially all of your data and files are backed up for you because they are stored in the Cloud, and as a result they are always available to you, wherever and whenever you are working.

The Cloud provides a disaster recovery solution in the event of fire, theft, flood or local IT problem. Whatever the problem, you can simply logon from a device with an internet connection.

Examples

Microsoft Office 365, Sage One Payroll, AdvantEDGE and Epitaph are good examples of Cloud software that are suitable for Local Councils and introduced below.

Office 365

Many of us rely on Microsoft Office and Office 365 is a good example of Cloud software. At EDGE we currently recommend and supply the Office 365 Business Premium edition for £9.40* per month, per user. EDGE will setup Office 365 and migrate your data to the Cloud. Staff are provided with access to both shared and private emails, calendars and documents. As Office 365 documents that are deleted cannot be recovered after 30 days, EDGE also offer a backup service to store documents for 3 months, 6 months or indefinitely.

Sage One Payroll

Sage One Payroll is ideal for most Local Councils with four bands supporting up to 5, 10, 15 or 25 employees. Prices start from £6* per month for 5 employees.

AdvantEDGE & Epitaph

EDGE provide the AdvantEDGE and Epitaph range of nine Cloud software applications designed for Local Councils including:

- Admin (free with any other module)
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EDGE charge in bands according to usage so that the software is affordable to all sizes of council. Prices start from £123* per annum for Finance for councils with income of up to £10,000 per annum.

In 2019 EDGE offer a range of portals and apps for its AdvantEDGE range which builds on its 13 years of experience providing web and mobile bookings for their Epitaph cemetery and crematoria module.

Improving your services

If you are interested in harnessing the Cloud, or you have any IT requirements, or require IT support, please do not hesitate to contact us at EDGE.

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Loud and clear

Cllr Sue Baxter, NALC chairman, explains how the organisation has been making sure that the local council sector's voice is being heard by the new government

“Events, dear boy, events”, was how former Conservative prime minister Harold Macmillan described what would determine his government's course. Several years later, his Labour successor Harold Wilson famously said: “A week is a long time in politics.”

Both politics and events, when taken together, inevitably shape and often reshape the very cornerstone of NALC's work promoting our members: lobbying the government and parliament.

The Princess Royal's historic attendance and speech at NALC's Annual Conference six months ago seem a distant memory given two other momentous events since, which have become the focus for our advocacy. The “will we? won't we?” question of a General Election was finally answered in December, leading to a renewed sense of urgency and purpose for many seeking to build links with, and influence, the new government.

My New Year open letter prioritised contact with ministers across the new government to ensure local councils and their future development were firmly on its agenda, including on our key themes of health and wellbeing, the climate emergency, and engaging young people.

So how have we taken this forward?

Firstly, analysing the Conservative manifesto and Queen's Speech to identify areas of interest and where we can help the government deliver its objectives (and along the way push some of our own). These include devolution and local democracy, towns and the local economy, transport and housing and planning

Secondly, by writing to ministers to set out our offer, coupled with re-engaging with civil servants to set the challenging task of delivering on the government's promise to the country. In January, we met officials to talk about the communities framework and commitments around setting up new councils, and related issues such as devolution, funding and data on the sector.

Thirdly, by restarting the All-Party Parliamentary Group on local democracy, which is essentially ‘friendly’ MPs and peers who want to promote and champion our sector in both Houses of Parliament. Two new co-chairs – Cheryl Mackrory, MP for Falmouth and Truro, and Richard Holden, MP for North West Durham – were elected. At their first meeting, the group urged us to make early contact with MPs, especially the newly elected.

Which is where the fourth strand comes in: our annual Lobby Day. Now in its fifth year, representatives from our National Assembly met around a hundred parliamentarians in early March.

“In recent weeks I have seen the sector step up and demonstrate like never before our support to our communities”

That local councils have never been more critical to building strong communities was also a contention in my open letter. A point I restated in my meetings on Lobby Day with government ministers keen to explore how our battalions of 10,000 councils and army of 100,000 councillors could help in the nation's battle against coronavirus.

Fast forward to now, and in recent weeks I have seen the local council sector step up and demonstrate like never before our support to our communities. This was why we refocused our work to ensure the resilience of the organisation, which in turn would allow us to support the sector with guidance and information, and also engage with the government, with our focus for the latter concentrating on four key areas.

First is working closely with county associations to identify the immediate impact on the operation of our councils. Such as holding meetings and local audit, where we successfully persuaded the

government to allow virtual meetings and an extension to statutory end-of-year accounts deadlines.

Second is gathering examples of how local councils are responding. Our *Coronavirus case studies* publication currently runs to 350 instances of councils coordinating volunteers, acting as information hubs to provide guidance from the government and other agencies, helping businesses by publicising their online services, establishing emergency grant funds, and continuing to maintain parks and open spaces, and cemeteries. All efforts recognised by the secretary of state in a letter to councils praising how they have risen to the challenge.

Third is understanding the financial impact from additional costs and loss of income. We built on initial work with the Super Councils Network to survey all local councils, and latterly with county associations. We used this to press for measures such as the Job Retention Scheme to be made available to our councils, and to start making the case (including through the select committee) for a dedicated package of support for the sector, including financial assistance.

The final area is the constant liaison with the government on these and other issues as they arose, such as the delay to all elections and parish meetings.

Not historic words from a former prime minister, but my clarion call to you is this: support our national lobbying, your local lobbying is vital. My plea is tell your MP how you are helping your community, of the financial impact and the potential consequences, and ask them to call on the government for dedicated financial support.

No-one can predict the next big event or political change and how this will affect our work engaging with the government. Until then, our focus will remain firmly on helping county associations and councils to support communities through these difficult times, and along the road to recovery ahead. ■

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Council focus



Organising numerous events, ensuring its parks and open spaces are kept in tip-top condition and access to physical activities are just some of the projects Salisbury City Council undertakes for its local residents, says communities manager Annie Scadden

Salisbury is the only cathedral city in the county of Wiltshire, with a population of around 44,000. Following the setback of the 2018 poisoning incident, Salisbury is now looking to the future, drawing inspiration from our rich heritage, to imagine our medieval city once again being a magnet for travellers, pilgrims and traders.

Salisbury City Council (SCC) is very proud to have been a finalist for the NALC Star Council Awards, and I am delighted to share some highlights of our activity.

Events

Our teams provide a diverse range of activities and services, including those recently devolved to us from Wiltshire Council. Our historic charter markets take place twice a week, providing a much-valued service to our residents. We provide three teenage markets a year, allowing young people to showcase their skills and initiative for free, whether they be jewellery makers, comedians or musicians.

We deliver numerous events including celebrating St George's Day, Tea in the Park, Armed Forces Day and Play Day; all offering free activities for families and with hundreds of people attending each event. We take part in Heritage Open Days, allowing our communities to visit buildings usually closed to the public. The Food & Drink Festival is another popular event featuring local food vendors. Our charter fair and carnival takes place in October, with up to 50 entries including local community groups, watched by thousands of people. Our Christmas lights switch on is always a popular event, attracting thousands of people into the city to enjoy an evening of family entertainment and late-night shopping opportunities.

Our information centre and Shopmobility

teams ensure visitors and residents can access the best the city has to offer. Behind the scenes our grounds teams continually work hard, ensuring our parks and open spaces are at their very best, ensuring our residents and visitors can spend time out of their busy days in tranquil and relaxing surroundings. This, coupled with our joint working between SCC-employed litter enforcement officers, city centre security officers and our

“The team organises fun days in local neighbourhoods, where communities can access a free family day with activities provided by local community organisations, including climbing walls, axe throwing, and face painting and other family entertainment”

contracted street cleaning team, ensures Salisbury is an all-round enjoyable, safe, clean and comfortable environment.

Our communities team works in partnership with many local organisations to ensure the wellbeing of the community. These include Wiltshire Community Foundation, which is funding the Stronger Families Programme, in one of our areas of social deprivation; aiming to bring together the local community to determine how this project unfolds and how and when the funding is spent. The team also works to provide local activities, such as lunch clubs and craft groups. The team organises fun days in local neighbourhoods, where the local communities can access a free

family day with many activities provided by local community organisations, including climbing walls, axe throwing, and face painting and other family entertainment.

Our physical activity leaders work in local schools and care homes, enabling students and older people to access physical activity sessions. They also provide free holiday activities such as sports roadshows in local neighbourhoods. Last year saw the inaugural annual senior games, where older people are encouraged to form teams and take part in a series of activities earning team points, culminating in the winning team being presented with a trophy and all participants receiving medals.

Voluntary group support

SCC supports local voluntary groups that occupy buildings or land owned by it by agreeing to a peppercorn rent. This allows money that would have been used to pay rent to be used by the group to provide more opportunities to their members and the local community. Additionally, the SCC Community Grants Scheme means up to £30,000 is available for local voluntary and community groups, allowing them to provide services and activities for the benefit of the local community.

In 2020, it is the 800th anniversary of Salisbury Cathedral moving from Old Sarum to where it is today. SSC is proud to be part of the celebrations. Working in partnership with Salisbury Cathedral and Wiltshire and Swindon Sports Partnership, we are aiming to provide a legacy of 20 qualified sports coaches, drawn from the local community.

The city council seeks to represent its community and tackle issues that are important to our residents. In 2019 we declared a climate change emergency, and this is a key focus for our work in 2020 and onwards.

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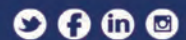


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County watch



In a bid to do something to halt the consistent lack of new candidates standing to become local councillors, Warwickshire and West Midlands Association of Local Councils embarked on a plan that aimed to bring much-needed new blood to their local councils. Here county officer John Crossling recounts how the plan was put in place

Local councils across the country struggle to find new councillors. Last year was election year for the vast majority of local councils in the Warwickshire and West Midlands Association of Local Councils (WALC) area, and the County Committee felt it was right that the association helped to encourage people to stand as councillors locally.

WALC is concerned that too often local people are approached (possibly down the pub), and they are persuaded to “join the council”. They are told that they “don’t have to do much, just turn up for four meetings a year”. They then stand – usually unopposed, as the council has not publicised the election to avoid paying the contested election costs. This results in the person turning up at the next council meeting not knowing what they have let themselves in for!

Our plan

We planned six events spread geographically across our area. We approached all the district and borough councils for their support, and they freely provided venues at their council premises together with refreshments. They also promoted the events locally.

We also approached the county council, which used its marketing team to promote the programme events through a variety of channels, including social media.

WALC produced local posters and sent them to our members asking them to include them on their websites and put them on their noticeboards.

We devised a consistent programme involving the county officer doing a presentation on who could be a councillor and the rules and expectations once you have become one. A local clerk spoke

on the internal workings of a council and the role of the clerk. The chair of WALC spoke on why she became a councillor, and a local councillor spoke on what they get from the role and how they balance their personal life with the demands of the position. We also provided a set of handouts which included NALC’s *All About Local Councils* and *It Takes All Sorts*.

Those who still wished to become a councillor – which was the vast majority – were given further handouts, the *Guidance For Candidates* from the Electoral Commission website and a full nomination pack for them to complete before the deadline to stand.

“We found that most of the people had stood to be elected and many did become councillors, either through contested elections, or they were simply unopposed”

Over the six events, we spoke to 41 prospective councillors who said they had learnt a lot, enjoyed the session and thought it was very worthwhile. We took email addresses and were given permission to contact them after the elections to find out how many became a councillor.

Unfortunately, WALC had to contact two interested people after an event at Rugby to inform them that the councils they were interested in were not holding elections this year. In one case they had just missed the election, which had taken place in the previous year, and in the other, they will have to wait until this year.

This will always be an issue with Rugby Borough holding its elections in thirds,

but despite that irritation, those who were interested will still be better informed when the time comes.

Apart from those issues, we found that most of the people had stood to be elected and many did become councillors, either through contested elections, or they were simply unopposed. A few were unsuccessful in contested elections, but at least they tried!

Contested elections

There has been some criticism that getting people to stand can result in contested elections, which costs the council money. WALC’s view is that getting new councillors to generate fresh ideas and enthusiasm within a council is essential to local democracy. New people joining a council will stimulate debate and will hopefully lead to more engagement with their communities, ensuring that their local councils remain relevant and valued.

We are not aware that another association has taken this approach before, but we feel it has been a worthwhile exercise and are likely to look to repeat it in another four years.

The positive engagement in this process by the principal authorities has been influenced by the agreed Local Council Charter and the establishment of their parish champions in the last 12 months.

Having encouraged people to stand as councillors, WALC decided to follow this up with a series of free training events called *Off to a Flying Start*, which were a high-level introduction to local councils. The intention of this was to capture the enthusiasm of the new councillors and to introduce them to the training we provide in the hope that they will then be keen to take up more detailed training that they will have to pay for!

From dawn to dusk

Young Councillor of the Year, Cllr Daniel Thomas, reveals a busy monthly schedule of planning, finance and hedge trimming – all of which he takes great joy in participating in

Much Wenlock in Shropshire, with a population of 3,300, is an attractive former market town which grew up around a monastery founded in around 680 AD. The town is the birthplace and home of Dr William Penny Brookes, the inspiration for the modern Olympic Movement and founder of the Wenlock Olympian Society. The Wenlock Olympian Games first took place in 1850 and still take place every July.

I was born, grew up and went to school here, and became a councillor because I wanted to give something back to the town. In addition to my council work, I have a full-time human resources job for a workplace solutions company. I juggle my time between the town council, home life, and being a beekeeper with eight hives.

Week one

The first week of the month always begins with a double whammy of meetings with the Planning & Environment Committee on Tuesday and the full town council meeting on Thursday. Planning can be a contentious issue in historic towns like Much Wenlock, so preparation is vital. I make sure I read the agenda, visit the sites and study the documents on the planning portal. Thankfully, this one is rather straightforward, and I can get home to a cooked meal made by my wife; we must remember how other people enable us to make a difference in our community.

At Thursday's town council meeting it's great to see a few members of the public attend. After the meeting, I feel encouraged by the work we've achieved over the last month, but surface water flooding in our town still rears its head, and we'll work hard to support our residents and local authority on this. Perhaps the highlight for me this evening is being nominated as mayor-elect. I'm thrilled and slightly apprehensive to hear my name being proposed by fellow councillors – the vote is unanimous, and



I can't help but smile. This will be an incredible honour for a local lad and one I couldn't have imagined at my by-election two years ago.

Week two

A busy week at work, but I've still got to chair our recreation ground meeting. I'll have studied the agenda over the weekend. Recently we've accomplished some great work with a drainage project, and the next stage is to improve the disability access so more people can enjoy the ground. This feels like we're making a difference, and I always feel motivated after these meetings. The project has been stressful, but worth it.

Week three

The recreation ground committee decided to save money by trimming the hedge with a team of volunteers rather than use an external tree surgeon. The call for volunteers had gone out, and one who had stepped forward was my father; he used his chainsaw to trim the hedge while volunteers dragged the trimmings to the chipper. We started at 7.30 am, and by 4.00 pm the job is complete, with five tonnes of wood chippings in the trailer. My fitness tracker shows I've walked 14 miles to and from the trailer carrying the trimmings! We've saved

money and shown how local residents and town councillors can work together well for the good of the community.

Week four

Now it's the Finance Committee where we look at current budgets and discuss town council assets. Not long ago the last bank in the area shut its doors for the last time – a disaster for a rural town with limited public transport where its many residents rely on cash and some pubs only let you pay by card if you're also buying food (!). The town council decided to purchase the premises and secure the cash machine which has been vital for the local economy as it's one of the busiest in the county.

Moving forward

For anyone reading this and considering whether to join a local council, I strongly urge you to "just have a go". Being under 30 I am very much a minority in local councils, but I hope this doesn't remain the case. I feel privileged to be able to play a role in my community. Providing you have the time to take part in meetings and other activities, I would recommend becoming a local councillor to anyone who wants to get involved and make a difference in their community. ■

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A LCAS story

NALC's nationally accredited programme, LCAS, provides local councils with the opportunity to ensure they are working to the highest standards and efficiency. Ann Dobbins, town clerk at Pershore Town Council in Worcestershire, explains why the scheme has been advantageous to the council

When I joined Pershore Town Council as a clerk in 2006, it was to join a council that aspired to be a Local Council Award Scheme Quality Council. The town council had had a few difficult years and firmly believed that to attain this would show how far it had come and what it had achieved. I was fortunate that the council agreed to pay for me to obtain my Certificate in Local Council Administration (CiLCA), which I did in February 2007, and almost immediately the council applied to become and was accepted as a Quality Council. This status was renewed in 2011, and in 2015 the council became one of the first in the country to reach Quality Gold status. This needed to be renewed in 2019, and the council was this time the first in the country to renew this status.

Why did we bother?

In 2007 it really raised the profile of the council and demonstrated to those partners and residents that we had turned a corner. The achievement showed that the council was operating at a high standard and had all the necessary policies and procedures in place. In 2006 when I joined, there were no staff contracts in place and certainly no staff appraisals! Hard work and the cooperation of the local county association demonstrated that Pershore was working well 'above its station' in many ways.

The real benefits started to become apparent in 2012 when the county council decided (subject to consultation) to close Pershore Library and locate it on the edge of the town at the district council offices. Meetings, discussions and negotiations started, with the county council's apparent goal of demonstrating that the move was the only option available to it to save

the necessary costs. At a meeting with the chief executive officer and officers, someone suggested that the town council simply buy the building and keep the library at its original location, in the centre of town. This was somewhat of a shock to the county council, but the members went away to think about it. Later the county council chief executive challenged the town council to come up with a plan, but said that without our Quality Council badge she would not have even entertained the idea!

The result was that the town council purchased the library building and borrowed £500,000 from the Public Works

“Quality Gold was a challenge, but there was never a time where the town council even considered aiming for less”

Loan Board to extend and refurbish it. As the county council also needed to save revenue costs, a member of the town council staff now works at the library. We have also recruited someone who is working for both the town and county councils, so that residents get an outstanding service whether they are dealing with a town or county council officer. It was a real achievement and helped to keep the High Street thriving.

So, why carry on? Quality Gold was a challenge, but there was never a time where the town council even considered aiming for less. It was with great pride that Pershore became the fourth council in the country to achieve Quality Gold status in 2015. However, times change

and in 2017 along came Brexit and the distrust of politicians. For the first time, the council found itself being challenged at meetings and on Facebook about every decision it made. The council was accused of some dreadful things on Facebook for which there was no evidence. It was a horrendous and stressful time for staff and members, who even began to doubt their own judgement.

Even though it caused us a great deal of hurt, we got through this terrible time. How? My advice to anyone being vilified on Facebook is to talk to people about the situation. By telling people who respected me (I too was targeted) and our members, it meant that eventually, those who were attacking us stopped doing so.

So, with our Quality Gold status up for renewal in 2019 and the council having been through a difficult time, we had to ask if it was worth applying and even if we did, would we get it? The council decided to try. Maybe it would not be considered up to scratch, but nothing ventured... We put our application through and got it – partly because of the way we had handled everything we had been through.

I have been clerk now since 2006, and since 2007 we have been at the forefront of quality in this sector. The council and I are immensely proud of this, and as we continue to grow and improve, we hope that we can demonstrate to others in the sector that it is worth getting the award. It shows both residents and other partner organisations that we have a professional outlook backed by excellent and high-quality processes and procedures. Why wouldn't anyone go for it?

To find out more about LCAS email nalc@nalc.gov.uk

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THE BIG THEMES

With NALC's priorities for this year focusing on the key themes of health and wellbeing, the climate change emergency and youth engagement, this new section will concentrate on the good work NALC, county associations and local councils are doing in these areas

Andrew Tubb, NALC's part-time policy adviser, and NALC intern, Claire Goldfinch, take a look back at the work the organisation has been doing around health and wellbeing and what work will be carried out in the future

HEALTH AND WELLBEING

Health and wellbeing is an integral part of our daily lives and is essential to a happy and healthy community. NALC has been leading the way on raising awareness about health and wellbeing for its members.

As the first tier of local government and the closest port of call for residents, local councils can play a huge role in ensuring that our communities are stronger, healthier and thriving places to live.

Health and wellbeing is personal and different for each of us, which is why the uniqueness of local councils can be put to good use in improving the lives of millions of people. Ten thousand local councils know the communities they serve and are best placed to identify and respond to their needs and the effects of hidden disabilities. Duncan Selbie, chief executive at Public Health England, told this magazine in the Summer 2019 edition: "What is clear is that local councils are indispensable to the solutions around keeping people in good health."

NALC has played a strategic role in raising awareness, encouraging joined-up working and sharing best practice to bring positive change in our local communities.

A good starting point to find out about NALC's sector-specific projects is our health and wellbeing case study publication on creating healthier communities. It includes case studies relating to

Crohn's and colitis; mental health; social prescribing; transport; young people; dementia; and loneliness.

We often associate dementia and loneliness with older people, but our health and wellbeing journey starts from the moment we are born. NALC's health and wellbeing webpage provides a useful resource in increasing our understanding

"Local councils can play a huge role in ensuring that our communities are stronger, healthier and thriving places to live"

of a wide range of conditions and diseases that can impact our day-to-day lives.

NALC has embarked on significant strategic partnerships with major health charities such as the Alzheimer's Society and the Epilepsy Society to raise awareness of hidden disabilities in communities. These partnerships promote the role of local councils in improving people's quality of life.

There is a lack of understanding of how these disabilities affect our most rural communities. Local councils can play their part to raise awareness, provide outlets such as group activities and help communities become healthier and happier. It is incredible to see the power

that parishes have in providing for their vulnerable residents.

NALC's proactive approach in encouraging local councils to reach out to their communities, together with principal authorities and other key partners, led to a joint publication with the Local Government Association (LGA) called *Reaching out, a guide to tackling loneliness*.

Building on this, NALC regularly receives invitations to help shape government policy and provide invaluable insight from a local council and community perspective.

Recent examples include:

- the Health Education England symposium;
- Breaking Barriers Innovations (BBI) and Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government roundtable;
- All-Party Parliamentary Group Loneliness Independent Inquiry.

Alongside this involvement, NALC maintains regular dialogue with senior civil servants to raise awareness of the issues faced in local communities and how policy and legislation can help support local councils in making a difference.

This year will be crucial as NALC seeks to develop its collaborative engagement and measure the impact of the work done on health and wellbeing.

To see NALC's health and wellbeing webpage go to www.nalc.gov.uk.



In the first of a two-part series, Cllr Chris Willmore of Yate Town Council explains how the council is supporting and challenging its young people to help them unleash their power and make a difference in their community

YOUTH ENGAGEMENT

Yate is a town about 12 miles from Bristol with a population of 20,000. The parish of Yate forms part of a larger built-up area of 35,000 people which straddles three parishes. There is a collaboration between the parishes on many issues, and the town council works with young people whatever their parish within the town. The town council was asked by NALC to share some of our work with young people. This article focuses on our approach and why it works. A second article will look at the facilities that result.

The key to what we have been doing is to put young people at the centre of our thinking – not just about youth facilities. You often hear young people described as ‘future citizens’, as if they are in a waiting room, where one day they will count. Our view is that they are citizens now and can make a difference to our town as long as we shuffle aside and give them the space to do so.

We want to encourage young people to pose and answer the question: “What can I say?” How do they see the world, and how can they make a difference?

- Young people see the world differently.
- Young people are change agents. (nobody has told them it is impossible)
- Are the experts in being young.

Let’s start by asking some questions. How old is your youngest councillor? Your youngest employee?

Problems begin when an organisation made up of older people asks young people to get involved. It can be easy to sit down and plan a project they can help with,

“Our view is that young people are citizens now and can make a difference to our town as long as we shuffle aside and give them the space to do so”

we ask them to help, and they don’t want to. We feel discouraged. We take it as a sign they aren’t willing to engage.

But really it is that they don’t want to engage in our project in the way we have specified. That is because they see the world differently.

We have found exciting things happen when we trust young people; when we don’t specify what it is they should be doing to change the world, but instead, we support them to identify the issues and activities they want. Let us give you an example. One of our councillors was leading a project in Bristol (which eventually won a national and international award) with 18- to 21-year-olds. It aimed to support young people to help make a more sustainable city. If we wanted an 18- to 21-year-old to engage with homelessness, we might take them to visit a hostel. But frankly, only those already committed would turn up. This style activities just don’t attract people of any age in their spare time.

Now see this through the eyes of a teenager. Knitting is fashionable. A teenage girl had knitted her very first scarf. She was proudly wearing it, but it was a cold night, and she saw a homeless man. Something caught her mind, and she gave him the scarf. She then got her friends knitting and set up a knitting society making things for homeless people. After a while, the hostel said: “Why not come in and meet some

of the homeless people and find out what they'd like you to make." We would never have thought of that as a way of getting teenagers engaged with homeless people as people. The lesson is: follow their insights, don't try to force them into yours.

And learn from their different perspective. When I was a child, my grandmother predated the motor car. So, when my father asked where we would like to go to on a Sunday my grandmother would ask: "Are we taking the car?" She had two world maps in her mind, one of places to go, and the other, newer one, of places to go with a car. She needed to know which map to look at mentally. I never asked that question. I did not remember a world without the car. I had a single integrated map. However hard she tried she would always have two mental maps. One of the great things young people bring to decision making is that they start from that integrated map. They've already connected up things we still have to think about consciously. We can learn from that different vision.

Young people are criticised for being impatient – no, they simply run on a different time clock. Not better, not worse, just different. We cannot expect them to fit around our time clock, so we have to make sure things happen in their timescale if at all possible – and keep communicating.

Plain talking

Communication is not about talking via parents, or in 'council' speak. But speaking plainly, in the groupings they choose to form – not as occasional gestures but through regular and trusted relationships including youth workers – and recognising they are going to push us and make us uncomfortable sometimes. But that is their role, to be agents of change.

Involve young people as leaders and role models – if you see someone your sort of age in a leadership role, you are more likely to think people your age are respected and more likely to want a slice of that yourself.

Key to our work is focusing on THEIR agenda – what young people tell us they want (not what we want to give them or think they ought to want). That means really careful listening. We paid a 22-year-old student, Rachel Lander, to do a study working with young people in Yate to find out what it was like living in Yate as a young person and what changes they wanted. Then we acted on those findings. We see



our role as helping turn young people's ideas into reality – not just the direct provision of skateboard parks, but to create the town they want.

They said they wanted a cinema, so we campaigned with them to get one. Everyone from the MP through to the councillors backed them. We helped them organise street stalls for petitions; they did photo stunts, we took it to the town centre

"Please don't say we struggle to get young people onto our councils. If you mean they don't want to play a game designed by older people, then we have to change how we work"

owners. We kept young people informed so they didn't lose heart. And finally, we got a commercial cinema.

The two young people who were most often manning the petition stalls stood for the local council at the next election. They had discovered the joy of making a difference.

As a town council, we employ apprentices and give them leadership roles, organising events, coming up with ideas and working with older residents to introduce new ideas.

One final example: a six-year-old boy who used our common a lot wrote to the

council asking for more litter bins and sent a little drawing saying where the bins should be. That got in the press. We delivered. Then he asked for more trees on the common, and he and his friends did some of the planting. He discovered that you could change things. He became a parish councillor at 21, and was running the council's £1m budget within weeks.

So please don't say we struggle to get young people onto our councils. If you mean they don't want to play a game designed by older people (as one NALC conference speaker parodied – pale, stale and male), then we have to change how we work, cut through the processes and instead have one that makes sense to the world as it now is, not as it was when we were young.

Of course, it matters that you provide the facilities young people want, but it is as much about attitude as about the particular facilities.

A final thought. In World War II we relied on 18- to 21-year-olds – the average age of a Spitfire pilot was 21. And when bomber pilot Guy Gibson was asked to form the Dambuster Squadron and train and motivate them for such a high-risk operation, he was just 23.

Today the risk is we would ask a 23-year-old if he would like to be a door steward, rather than giving him the chance to lead an utterly innovative, now-famous project. Something has happened to us that we no longer see young people as leaders. It isn't that our young people are less able, we are just less able to give them their wings. ■



With flooding devastating areas again this year, Peter Hebard, voluntary coordinator of Brockenhurst Parish Council's Flood Action Group (BFAG), offers some advice on fixing flood problems and combating climate change

CLIMATE CHANGE EMERGENCY

Brockenhurst lies in the heart of the New Forest, a national park and one of the UK's largest sites of special scientific interest (SSSIs). It is the perfect place to put benign and cost-effective techniques such as natural flood management into practice – not just to prevent flooding but to manage water for wetlands, livestock and the drought that climate change might also bring on.

Although the Environment Agency's flood risk map for the village looks alarming because there are 185 properties in the highest risk area, none has recently flooded. So the more immediate problem seemed clear – in the worst storms, six out of seven roads could flood. While this is relatively minor compared to Cumbria, it is nonetheless a challenge to get them fixed without additional funds.

Flood Action Group

When the parish council set up its Flood Action Group in 2016, we knew our Highways Department was stretched. So, rather than complaining, we asked how could we help to fix the problems. In

response, the Highways Department told us what help they needed and from whom.

It proved easier for us as an independent community group to ask other authorities for help. Network Rail promptly cleared its culverts, and by good fortune, Forest authorities were about to convert a pond into a livestock pen, so we asked them to dig out the drainage ditch, which was as much in their interest as our own.

We soon realised that we could act as the eyes and ears for highway engineers. While they were desk-bound during the worst, we could be out watching the floods as they developed, sending photos and helping diagnose the cause. Most just needed basic maintenance of ditches, long since forgotten and totally overgrown, but some proved far more challenging and used to stay flooded for days.

On the worst problems, it transpired that the water was coming up the drains – off the railway line, not off the road. On others, vast amounts of gravel washed off the roadside blocked culverts, which contractors were unaware of and unable to shift. But by BFAG monitoring levels either side at the height of the storm, the

Highways Department could locate the blockage and justify bringing in a larger machine to blast it out.

As the forecast one Christmas was dire, we declared the first-ever climate emergency to persuade Natural England to let us clear the SSSI brook downstream. The local hotel brought in its own mini-digger, and a day later it was fixed.

All those solutions saved money, proving how communities can collaborate with authorities and coordinate their actions to get things done.

Looking forward

The latest Met Office climate change models predict that rainstorms could be far more intense. Even our huge forests will not be enough, so we need to use manmade features, such as causeways, to hold back enough water to prevent flooding and to also mitigate drought. Environment Agency rainfall, river level and LIDAR data online have proved useful, as have tools from the Flood Estimation Handbook Web Service. It looks as though natural flood management could help protect village properties at risk but only if all park authorities cooperate. ■

SWIGA guarantee based on industry expertise

The Solid Wall Insulation Guarantee Agency (SWIGA) is a not-for-profit guarantee provider for solid wall solutions. Set up by the industry to encourage continuous quality improvements with its unique quality framework, SWIGA provides support directly to the homeowner / Local Authority as well as through its extensive network of members' expertise and support.

SWIGA's guarantees offer cover for: external wall and hybrid systems for traditional solid wall properties; non-traditional properties such as no-fines concrete and frame buildings; as well as providing cover for low-, mid- and high-rise apartments.

Solid wall insulation measures have been established for over 35 years and have a proven track record; however, the SWIGA guarantee provides property owners with peace of mind in case of any defects occurring because of workmanship or materials. There are some that view solid wall insulation as a relatively new technology, but it's been around for many years in this country and throughout Europe.

Whilst there is innovation

taking place within the industry, and new systems are being developed, it is a tried and tested, very energy efficient method of insulating, already appreciated by tens of thousands of property owners and occupants throughout the country.

SWIGA's high rise offer covers all purpose-built apartments up to 20+ storeys. The process further limits the contractors who can carry out these works based on experience, net worth and in-house quality team. It also limits the systems used to those that are fully tested for above 18m in height, can only be supplied directly to the contractor as a system package, and only once proof of training for that specific system has been provided. The high-rise process also involves a third-party rated UK-based insurer. They check the property using surveyors at three critical stages of the installation. This ensures the system being applied is correct for the substrate and building height and that the quality and installation are fit for purpose.

Andrew Champ, Executive Director of SWIGA, said: "SWIGA's commitment to providing the consumer, building owner and the industry with a dependable guarantee is shown in the



quality of the companies that are currently members.

"SWIGA's Contractor and System holder membership has to meet stringent entry criteria prior to joining to ensure they are trained correctly, are carded, understand the systems and installation techniques needed to fit the specific systems correctly and purchase the full system from the supplier with clear traceability. [It also ensures] the companies that join are financially viable as businesses to carry out the scale of solid wall insulation work proposed.

"The SWIGA warranty is backed by a robust 25-year guarantee with an industry-leading Quality Assurance framework and at a cost of £79 + VAT per standard house; this represents fantastic value for money. High rise project prices are based on the number of storeys and include the cost of three visits from our third-party insurer."

Andrew added: "Not only does SWIGA provide consumer protection with our independent 25-year Guarantee, but also we can offer the consumer independent industry expertise – our

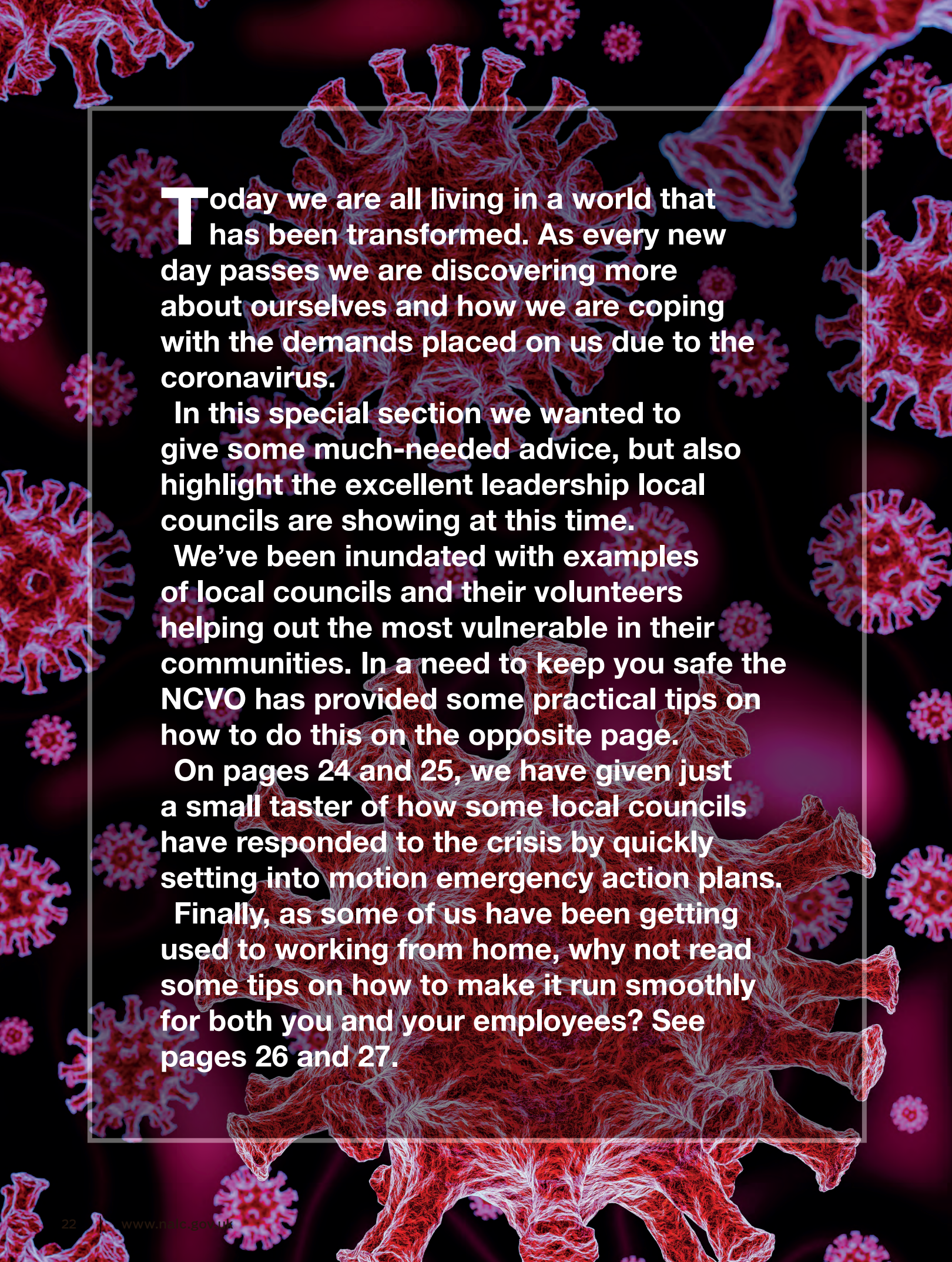
membership includes all the major system designers, but we also have an independent approach and can offer an opinion on client projects. SWIGA is heavily involved with improving industry best practice and sits on the steering groups for PAS2030, the new PAS2035 and works with the industry bodies to produce best practice documentation to support the contractors.

"We differ from most traditional insurance companies in that in the unusual event of installation issues after completion of the work, we will arbitrate directly with the homeowner on any disputes, working with our network to obtain the best outcome for the owner. Our prime focus has always been on prevention, not cure. Our Quality Assurance framework is key, and our pre-vetting procedures are developed to avoid issues from the outset."



For more information about solid wall insulation

and the SWIGA Guarantee
email info@swiga.co.uk
or call 01525 854977.



Today we are all living in a world that has been transformed. As every new day passes we are discovering more about ourselves and how we are coping with the demands placed on us due to the coronavirus.

In this special section we wanted to give some much-needed advice, but also highlight the excellent leadership local councils are showing at this time.

We've been inundated with examples of local councils and their volunteers helping out the most vulnerable in their communities. In a need to keep you safe the NCVO has provided some practical tips on how to do this on the opposite page.

On pages 24 and 25, we have given just a small taster of how some local councils have responded to the crisis by quickly setting into motion emergency action plans.

Finally, as some of us have been getting used to working from home, why not read some tips on how to make it run smoothly for both you and your employees? See pages 26 and 27.

How to help safely

Need some practical advice on involving, managing and protecting your volunteers during the coronavirus outbreak? The NCVO Volunteering Development Team helps out

SAFEGUARDING FOR VOLUNTEER MANAGERS

Coronavirus means that volunteers will be helping a broad number of people, some of whom may be vulnerable due to age, illness or disability. Before helping, everyone should have a basic understanding of safeguarding and who to report to if there are concerns.

If you are supporting or organising volunteers, you should:

- understand the risks of your volunteer roles or activities, how you will manage those risks, including following rules on Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) checks and how to handle safeguarding concerns if a volunteer tells you a vulnerable person is being harmed or is at risk of harm;
- know how to verify the identity of people who wish to volunteer, for example ask to see a driving license;
- look at the roles being carried out and think about the risk to volunteers and the people they are helping;
- choose the appropriate level of DBS check based on the risks;
- make sure everyone understands they have a responsibility to safeguard people from harm or risk of harm;
- listen to a volunteer's concerns if they are worried about a person and take them seriously. You should record what you are being told. A safeguarding policy will help you set out how volunteers can report concerns. Tell the relevant authority – this could be the local authority safeguarding team, the police or Action Fraud.

SAFEGUARDING FOR INFORMAL VOLUNTEER-LED GROUPS

Informal groups or networks of people who don't have a process for recruitment decisions do not need to carry out DBS checks (more on this below). However, they should make clear to beneficiaries that volunteers have not been checked.

If you think a role carries a higher level of risk that requires these checks or additional support, it is often best to work through an established organisation via a volunteer centre.

Here are some ways you can help safeguard beneficiaries.

- Do not overstate the checks that have been carried out on volunteers – this might create a false sense of security for beneficiaries.
- Ask people to volunteer in pairs, observing social distancing rules where possible.
- Be clear why roles have certain limitations and stay within them, for example not going into people's houses.
- Follow the up-to-date government guidance to stop the spread of the virus, including hand washing and keeping two metres away from people being helped.
- Have clear processes for handling money.
- Don't collect or store personal details of people unless absolutely necessary. See the data protection section.
- Know how to recognise and report harm or risk of harm.

DBS CHECKS AND VOLUNTEERS

Only a few roles need a DBS check by law. Many common coronavirus-related volunteer roles are not regulated, and therefore do not require a DBS check or barred list check. These include shopping for people who are voluntarily self-isolating, picking up prescriptions, driving (with the exception of transporting patients), befriending, posting mail and delivering items or dog walking.

- If you think a volunteer in your organisation might be carrying out a regulated activity, use the government's DBS online tool to find out whether you need to take action.
- If the purpose of the volunteer role is to support someone who is self-isolating, this does not make this regulated activity. Even if someone becomes ill while self-isolating, if the purpose of the volunteering role is to support them to distance themselves from others, it is unlikely this role is regulated.
- As a guide, ask yourself "would supporting this person have been regulated before they self-isolated?" If the answer is no, then it is not likely to be a regulated activity.
- It is a criminal offence for barred individuals to undertake regulated activity with children or vulnerable adults. An organisation will be held liable if it knowingly places someone into these situations.
- There are three types of DBS check. A basic check costs £23 and there is no eligibility requirement. Standard and enhanced checks are free for volunteers, but only for certain roles.

For more information, such as volunteer expenses and data protection, see the coronavirus page at www.knowhow.ncvo.org.uk. Please be aware that this advice is changing rapidly, so this guidance should be checked regularly.

Supporting your communities

Up and down the country, local councils are galvanising their staff and volunteers to help their communities through the crisis. Here we round up the good work of just a few

ROWLANDS CASTLE PARISH COUNCIL Hampshire

Working with a group of proactive local volunteers, the council has distributed 1,400 postcards to each household in the neighbourhood, advising them of a dedicated telephone number and email address. These contacts can be used by residents who need help with shopping, dog walking or a friendly call, and for those self-isolating. A WhatsApp group has been set up with over 80 volunteers to coordinate the service, and DBS-checked volunteers have been recruited by the local pharmacy to deliver medication. The council has acted as a 'hub' for these arrangements.

SAFFRON WALDEN TOWN COUNCIL Essex

The council is supporting local efforts in conjunction with the district council by encouraging all volunteers to register on the council's website. Residents can use the website to find helpful advice, along with requesting help and support. The council is regularly using social media to keep the public informed and updated with information as it received it. Saffron Walden Tourist Information Centre has opened its phone lines to offer a supportive service to anyone living in isolation. This is a daily five-minute telephone call to see how they are, check they are well and see if they need any help. The council staff is helping with food bank deliveries and is supporting the services of a currently over-run charity.

CREWE TOWN COUNCIL Cheshire

The council is supporting local organisations through its work via A Vision for Crewe – Crewe's Community Plan. The council's focus has been supporting its community partners who have had to adapt their services. It has also purchased IT equipment to enable virtual counselling and befriending sessions. It has purchased or sourced gifts-in-kind items and Personal Protection Equipment to support public health measures. Working closely with CVS Cheshire East, the council is supporting forums, providing advice and guidance and is also assisting them to research and complete funding applications.

COTTENHAM PARISH COUNCIL Cambridgeshire and Peterborough

The council organised 140 volunteers who are performing tasks such as shopping, collecting prescriptions and making friendly phone calls. Through the General Power of Competence it is using its website, which has been modified to become a pre-payment shopping system, in conjunction with the local Co-op store, to allow volunteers to multi-buy for residents. For elderly residents unable to use that system, the council is using a Monzo card which can be used by the volunteers to pay for shopping directly.

FOLKESTONE TOWN COUNCIL Kent

The council set up a Coronavirus Resilience Grant of £20,000 offering fast grants of up to £500 a time to various community organisations. It has also collaborated with the district council and community groups to set up the Folkestone Community Hub which has dedicated helplines. Council officers are NHS responders and are also volunteering at the hub.

HALVERGATE PARISH COUNCIL Norfolk

The council has sent a letter to every household offering support and information, including listing volunteers who had already come forward but were asking for more help with shopping, collecting prescriptions and anything else, within reason.

The council is highlighting the details of the local pub which is doing takeaway food orders. Halvergate is also constantly updating its website, Facebook and noticeboards with the latest coronavirus information from the government and the county council.

MOULTON PARISH COUNCIL

Northamptonshire

The council has hand-delivered 3,200 leaflets to local households to request volunteers and provide a phone number for residents who may need assistance. Over 100 volunteers have come forward to assist 50 vulnerable households. As well as this latest project, Moulton already has a Good Neighbour Scheme in operation and several vulnerable people referred to them by the GP surgery. The council's community connector is contacting people to check on their wellbeing and coordinate the new volunteers. The council is regularly in contact with the local churches, the GP surgery, pharmacy and local shops. In addition, the local allotment group is growing vegetables for distribution to residents, and local postal workers are setting up a food bank.

A new campaign called #NorthantsTogether has been launched to share local information and advice about COVID-19. Organisations across the county will use the shared hashtag and phrase NorthantsTogether, which will make it easier for people to find the local updates, support, advice and information that are available across the county.

POTTON TOWN COUNCIL

Bedfordshire

The council has set up the Potton Community Help Group which is assisting residents with collecting prescriptions and shopping. When the council realised that people might find themselves experiencing hardship, it agreed to set up a new food bank, and as part of that it created a JustGiving page to raise funds for those who find themselves in need of assistance. A special edition newsletter has also been produced. In it the council outlines useful local contacts, a helpline for local residents and up-to-date government advice.

KEMPLEY PARISH COUNCIL

Gloucestershire

The council initially activated its emergency plans and set up two community WhatsApp groups: Kempley Emergency Plan and Kempley Keep in Touch. The first group is to connect members of the community who require assistance and to share important information. The second is to keep the community connected and to provide encouragement and support. The council has set up a Zoom community platform to allow the council, the emergency response group and other community groups to meet online free of charge. It is using the community internet circulation list to inform parishioners of the new services and to pass on crucial information from the government. This also has details of local food deliveries.

The council is also revamping its cohort of community volunteers who operate a telephone system to keep in touch with parishioners, but in particular, the vulnerable individuals in the community. Their communication system is designed to ensure that no person is left out.

TAVISTOCK TOWN COUNCIL

Devon

Given the health emergency, the council has decided not to make grants in the normal way for 2020. Instead it has established a fund to support community groups and organisations working to mitigate the effects of the virus emergency on the most vulnerable. So organisations that seek to deliver initiatives within the town and to relieve hardship may be eligible for assistance. The fund has an emphasis on supporting start-up or one-off costs with awards not exceeding £1,000. Preference will be given to those partnering on national and local government initiatives.

YATE TOWN COUNCIL

Avon

The council is working with representatives of churches, neighbourhood watch groups, and the Facebook group followed by 2,500 residents wishing to assist vulnerable and isolated people during the crisis. It is taking a coordinated approach to best benefit local people and has awarded the food bank an emergency grant of £4,000, created an emergency grant fund of £4,500 to assist community groups, donated leftover food from the closure of its cafés to the food bank and donated 750 Easter eggs it had planned to use for the annual Easter Egg Hunt. Over the Easter holiday, the council also organised a virtual Easter bonnet competition via its Facebook webpage. Over the next couple of months, the council will continue to support the most vulnerable in the town and provide activities and support to home educators.

PRESCOT TOWN COUNCIL

Merseyside

Prescot Town Council has been running a food bank delivery scheme for three weeks now, distributing over £3,000 worth of food to vulnerable residents. This scheme provides residents with a 'Basic Box' of foodstuffs to support them through the two-week isolation period. These boxes are delivered by volunteers. The council has also set up a hotline for residents who may require support. The council is also providing up-to-date information on its website.

These are just a few of the 350 case studies NALC has collected since the lockdown was announced. To read more go to the Coronavirus – information for local councils page at www.nalc.gov.uk.

At home, at work

As the coronavirus forces us to work from home, Maria Aguilar, director at HR Services Partnership, gives ten tips on how to navigate homeworking and manage teams remotely

In recent years the number of staff exercising their right to request flexible working has risen exponentially, with a good amount of these seeking to work from home for one or two days a week. Employers have sometimes found these requests frustrating, often citing an inability to keep oversight of the work undertaken as a reason to reject homeworking. Requests to change the hours staff work, mainly where these are outside the standard working day, and to work more flexibly have often been met with similar concerns. But that was all before the coronavirus and the lockdown. Many employers who haven't furloughed staff now want them to work from home as much as possible, following government advice and ensuring their organisations can keep going. The imperative for councils

to continue to deliver their services is a strong motivation to support employees to work from home.

“The difference is that working from home is being imposed on people with limited time to prepare”

Having said all this, there are very many smaller local councils, without an office, whose councillors and clerks may well be reading this and wondering what all the fuss is about. Haven't they worked effectively from home for years? And the answer is yes, of course they have, which shows that it can be done. However, the

difference with the current situation is that working from home and remote working are being imposed on people with limited time to prepare. It is a change to the established routine that people have built up. They didn't ask for it, and the reality is that not all human beings like change.

The other big difference is that town councils and larger parish councils with perhaps up to a dozen staff all working from an office, managing multiple buildings and services have had to change their way of working almost overnight. This is quite different to the clerk who applied for the job knowing they would be working from home.

So, what have we learnt from these new and imposed ways of working? And what can councils do, as employers, to support their staff?

1

Working from home is like Marmite. You either love it or hate it

Not having the daily commute, being able to wear what you like, having lunch in the garden and being able to get on with your work quietly are all cited as some of the benefits of working from home. On the other hand, it can be isolating and interfere with family life. We need to remember that many people enjoy the sociable aspect of work and others won't easily be able to separate work from home. If someone doesn't have a spare room, their dining table may become their office, and they may not have an opportunity to close the door on work and switch off until the next day.

Employers need to recognise that some people will hate working from home, and acknowledging that may help.



2

People need practical support

When in the office we make sure that people have the right office chairs and desks, that they have enough stationery and a printer. Making do with a dining room table and chair may be fine for a few hours or even a few days but may become uncomfortable after a while. Consider asking your team what they need and think about whether it is possible to get some of the equipment to homes.

3

Contractual obligations remain

When people work at home, their employer's employment policies and procedures still apply, as do the contractual obligations on both sides. Ask yourself whether aspects of any of these need adapting, for example, reporting sick leave, taking annual leave or requesting a change to working hours.

4

Confidentiality and data security

Data protection is not a barrier to homeworking, but councils do need to consider how the new arrangements will impact on the usual processes.

The Information Commissioner's Office reminds us that staff can use their own device or communications equipment, but you'll need to consider the same kinds of security measures for homeworking that you'd use in normal circumstances. It is sensible to revisit your data protection guidance and alert staff to any additional risks that may result from homeworking.



5

Cybersecurity

With the challenges presented by remote working, it is inevitable that there will be an increase in the number of scams and phishing attempts. Consider whether you need additional financial procedures in place or remind staff of those already in place.

6

Health and safety continues to be important

You should ask people to conduct a health and safety workstation assessment. If home working is a permanent arrangement, you will need to be satisfied that the employee has somewhere suitable to work and provide them with suitable equipment and furniture. If the arrangement is temporary, then the dining room may be fine but allow for plenty of short breaks and provide guidance on how to make their workspace better. For example, raising the laptop's height, so the screen is at eye level and then adding a separate keyboard and mouse. Another tip is to use a cushion to support your lower back and to sit on when using a dining room chair for long periods.

7



Remember why people come to work

The reasons people come to work are many and varied, but research tells us that high on the list are the sociable aspects of working and meeting other people. Arranging all-team meetings using a number of tools (for example, Zoom, Microsoft Teams, Skype and Go To Meeting) can be a useful way for people to keep in touch. Encouraging a little lightness can also help, but remember to always keep it appropriate.

Employers have a duty to support staff wellbeing

Imposed isolation, worrying about the impact of the coronavirus; worrying about family and friends; worrying about the future can have a real impact on people's mental and physical wellbeing. Employers are expected to support staff to deal with the pressures they face. The way to do this is to remain vigilant and alert to any signs that staff may be anxious, and then offer to discuss their situation and signpost them to relevant resources or organisations. Remember not to intrude or attempt to impose solutions, simply listen, signpost, and if it is helpful, offer an hour or two off so that individuals can make a call or visit a support service.

8

9

Communicate, communicate, communicate

When people aren't in the office, they aren't hearing things through the usual informal ways, so it's even more important to have regular verbal communications. We all rely on email, but a telephone or video call can go a long way to reduce the feeling of isolation and can also provide the opportunity to touch on other matters in a way structured emails don't. If a message is really important, an email sent ahead of a call gives people a little time to assimilate the information and provides an opportunity for people to consider the content and get back to you with questions.

10

Have fun!

Most workplaces will have occasional moments of laughter and fun. Try to re-create that with remote workers. A weekly quiz, a word of the week or sharing a joke can all help.



Harnessing the power of mobile

With rural areas crying out for better mobile coverage, Gareth Elliott, head of policy and communications at Mobile UK, the trade association for the mobile network operators, explains how it is working with all types of government to help solve the problem

Patchy mobile coverage is one of today's real concerns as the world becomes ever more connected. In the UK, many of the rural areas currently get only partial coverage or none at all. Ofcom's most recent data states that 91% of the country receives 4G coverage from at least one operator and 66% from all four. Having good mobile coverage is widely recognised as being essential for the future prosperity of the rural economy and rural communities. People increasingly want the flexibility to work from home, and many sectors such as farming, tourism and transport are using mobile connectivity to increase productivity and improve services. Happily, the industry and the government have come together with an unprecedented proposal which will significantly extend coverage and eliminate the vast majority of partial not-spot areas not covered by all four operators.

The proposal is called the Shared Rural Network and it is backed by both the government and all four of the mobile network operators, which are jointly investing £1bn. During the election campaign, the prime minister committed his government to formalise the agreement, which was done in March.

The Shared Rural Network programme is made up of two parts: eliminating partial not-spots and building new

coverage. The industry will be investing £530m to tackle the first part. This will involve the four network operators installing their own radio equipment on each other's existing masts, resulting in new 4G coverage from all mobile companies. As this involves all four operators, it goes further than previous Ofcom recommendations, which would have required only two operators to extend to

“The industry is already engaging with local authorities of all types and once we have a more detailed idea of the build plan, will be seeking to reach out further”

90% of the UK's landmass. It will eliminate a substantial majority of partial not-spots where currently there is only one or more operator. The second element involves the government investing £500m in building new masts for use by all four operators and thus extending 4G into areas where there is currently no coverage. The overall outcome from these two elements is that the four operators will provide 4G coverage to over 92% of the UK's landmass. In

addition, 95% of the UK's geographic area, and virtually every premises will be able to get 4G from at least one operator.

Local government will have an important role to play in ensuring that the Shared Rural Network programme runs according to plan. Upgrades and new infrastructure will require interaction with planning departments, and so having policies and guidance in place to prepare will enable more efficient deployment. Additionally, many local authorities, with strong political leadership, have already done some fantastic work to make mobile build-out easier, such as naming a single point of contact for 'barrier busting', and making assets available for equipment siting, on standard terms. The industry is already engaging with local authorities of all types across the country and, in the coming months, once we have a more detailed idea of the build plan, will be seeking to reach out further. Mobile UK, as the industry body, can help facilitate early discussions and will ensure that local authorities have the right contacts.

The Shared Rural Network is an exciting project that marks a step-change in 4G coverage across the UK. It is also ambitious, with completion set for 2025/26. The industry stands ready, and we look forward to working with local councils to

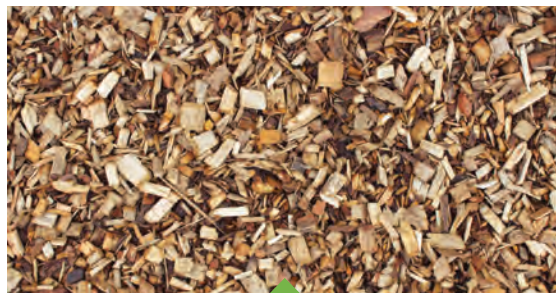
bring mobile connectivity to rural areas across the UK. ■



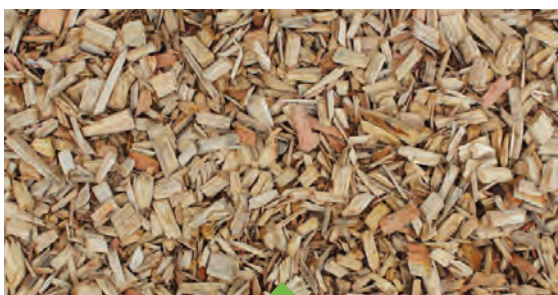
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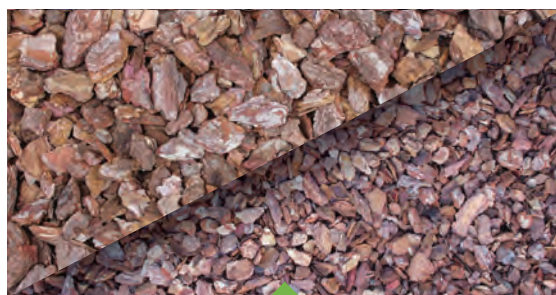
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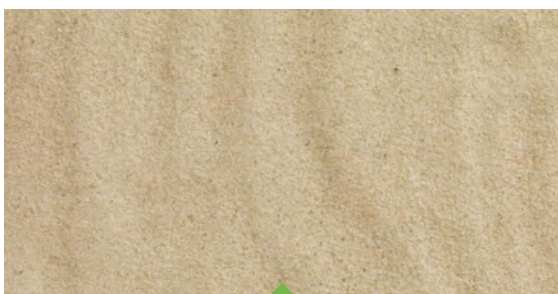
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Obituary

Cara Stobart, county officer at the Devon Association of Local Councils, remembers her friend and mentor, former county secretary Lesley Smith MBE

It was with profound sadness that we said goodbye to our colleague and friend, Lesley Smith MBE, earlier this year.

Lesley, former county secretary to the Devon Association of Local Councils, had been a stalwart supporter of communities and an exceptional advocate for local councils.

For our members, she was considered the font of all knowledge and a source of unflappable advice. In the numerous messages we have received since her passing, the gratitude for her years of support has been immeasurable. Her numerous professional qualities were mentioned, but it was her exceptionally supportive and kind nature which people appreciated the most, and how she will be remembered.

Lesley had worked for the association for 25 years, starting out as an assistant in 1993. She soon worked her way up to county secretary, a role she truly cherished and enjoyed. It was through this role that she was able to engage in a wide range of projects. Lesley worked with the South West County Associations to develop the original Quality Council Scheme (now the Local Council Award Scheme). She also supported students as a Local Policy tutor (now the Community Governance Degree) and was involved in twinning for several years too – to name just a few.

Lesley's proudest achievement was her MBE, which she was awarded in 2007 for services to Local Government in the South West. An award which was much deserved.

I had the pleasure of working with Lesley for 13 years as her assistant. I saw at first

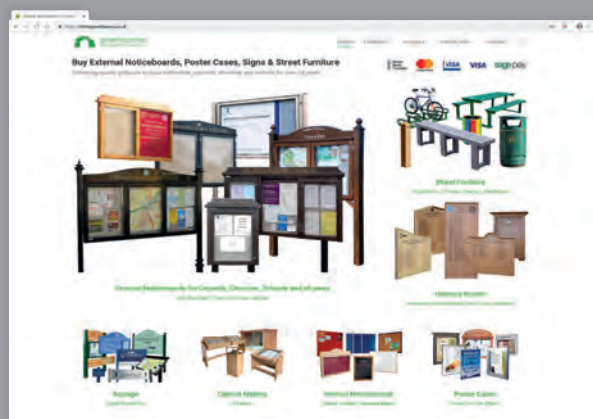
hand the incredible support she gave to Devon's councils. It was her dedicated work ethic, excellent judgement and calm, measured approach which garnered such respect and admiration from our members. Using good grace, and just the right amount of humour, she was able to defuse even the tensest of situations.

For me, she was a wonderful friend and mentor. I always thought she'd taken a gamble on me as her assistant, and I would certainly not be where I am today without her years of guidance and support.

I am incredibly grateful to have known and worked with her, as many others also feel.

Our sincerest condolences go to her family and those who knew her. She will be greatly missed.

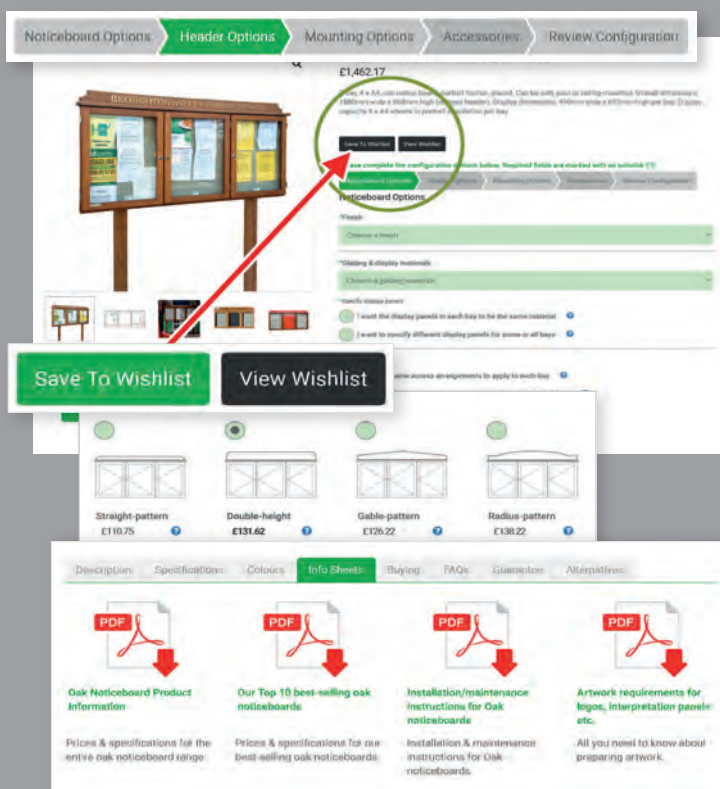
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Your say

Following the May 2019 local council elections, NALC conducted a survey asking councillors, councils and county associations about their experience of the election. Here we quote the answers they gave to the question: What more can be done to encourage more candidacy at local council elections? Plus, a round-up of some of the significant numbers to come from the poll

“More work needs to be done nationwide, and particularly within higher education, to redevelop faith in the democratic process and engage a wider scope of candidates”

“More simple, punchy advertising text encouraging people to stand”

58%

wanted more information about becoming a councillor

92%

said they would recommend becoming a councillor

“More support needs to be given to anyone showing an interest in being a councillor. Unless you are in the ‘know’ and are adept at extracting information from different sources, and have the time to do so, it is difficult to know what a local councillor does, the time necessary to devote to the job and a councillor’s responsibilities”

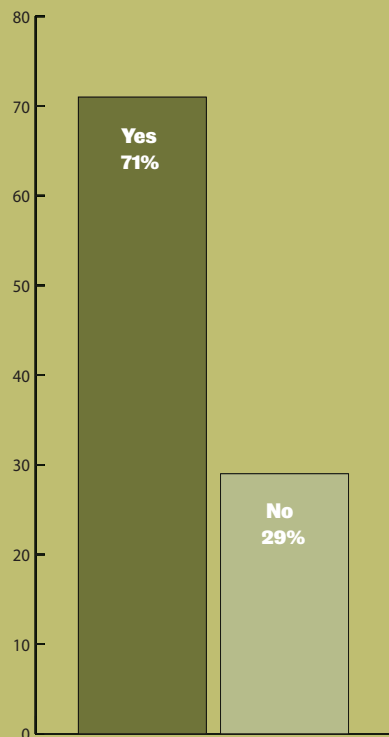
“An open day is a really good idea and may well come up with the right candidate for a council”

“One way to help would be a simple guide written for clerks which included timelines and how to organise an election year”

36%

stated more support would make standing for election easier

Do you think there should be a trial pilot for online election voting for local council elections?



Respondents: councils

“Incentivise people to do things in their local community. We should be appealing to different demographic groups centrally and getting people into it at a younger age would help. Being a councillor at any level is seen as exclusive, and onerous to become.

However if more were involved in the process more often, it would be normal to everyone to be a part of it”

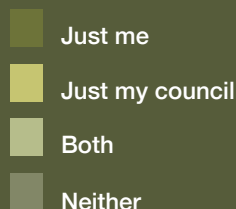
“Not enough publicity is done to promote the work of local councils and their roles are misunderstood by many residents. There is an ingrained mistrust of local councils by many who think we are paid like principal authority councillors”

“One way we could help is by holding more council events to promote the work and encourage participation”

“Our council needs to be more proactive and raise its own profile. This might encourage other people to come forward at the right time”

“Receiving a publication of information and training materials by the principal authority BEFORE I stood for nomination would have been helpful. I also think a general information pack outlining the rules and responsibilities of a councillor should be produced by either the government or the Electoral Commission”

Did you and/or your council use social media to promote the election?



Respondents: councillors

25%
of councillors were new and
38% were co-opted

90%

**of councils had
15 candidates
or less**

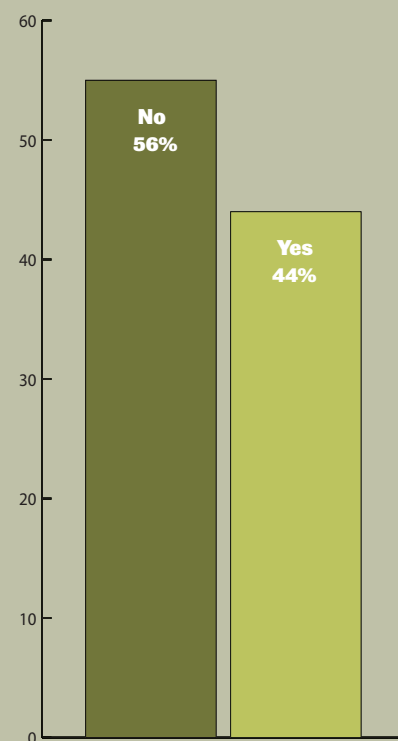
“We try and help by speaking at a variety of local events and putting councillor stories on the website”

“Ensure that candidates are aware it isn’t about politics but about the local area”

“Simpler processes, less paperwork and less jargon. Also not having to deliver nomination papers by hand would help!”

“Look at other ways of running a local council. Many people are interested in certain areas but not in all the activities of a council. Some different levels of councillors for example, so some would only deal with certain areas such as planning and leisure amenities in a subcommittee role but others would be full councillors”

Do you feel your council is more representative of its community after the 2019 election?

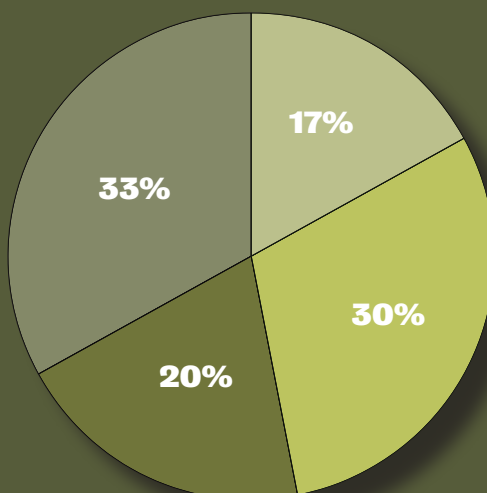


Respondents: councillors

“A lot of people who could stand for the council don’t because they believe the council chair has too much influence in the decisions taken. A way to help would be to restrict any councillor from being the council chair for more than three years – some councils have the same chair for over 20 years and this is not a healthy state for any council”

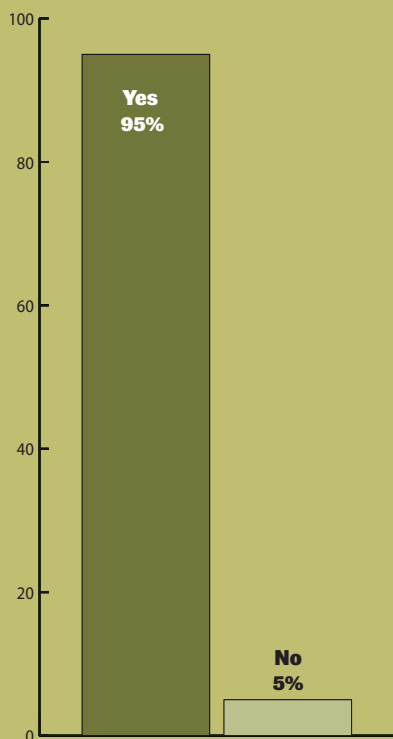
Compared to the 2015 elections are there now:

- more contested seats?
- more uncontested seats?
- more co-opted seats?
- other?



Respondents: councils

As a county association did you raise awareness of the May 2019 elections?



“Smarter working, for example change the law to allow councillors to use technology to attend meetings and vote. Offer flexible online training for new and existing councillors, which could be done around other responsibilities such as work and family life”

“In spite of more publicity than ever before, it is still very difficult to persuade people to stand for election. Lack of staff time results in no possibility to put on an election event – we are just too small. A letter to all residents post-election resulted in ten possible co-opted, so the answer may be a letter to all households **BEFORE** the election next time!”

62%
of councils said they wanted election forms to be simplified

“Needs more national promotion via social media and advertising”

“Information that promotes the role of councillors in a way that doesn’t perceive the role to be time consuming, because this is the main reason people are put off. Or that it is mainly for ‘older’ people. Clearer, more advance costings to allow councils to pre-empt more accurate costs when budget setting”

Did your county association run an election campaign?



Respondents: councils



Legal surgery

NALC senior solicitor and legal services manager, Jane Moore, looks at the law on smoking in council vehicles

This article looks at the issue of smoking in council vehicles. You may recall that last year we considered the law around the use of e-cigarettes and vaping given the current and continued popularity and prevalence of vaping. We noted in the article how the smoke-free legislation does not cover e-cigarette use as e-cigarettes do not burn tobacco and do not create smoke.

What does the law say?

The Health Act 2006 is the primary smoke-free legislation. As well as banning smoking in pubs, bars and restaurants, it made it a criminal offence to smoke cigarettes in virtually all enclosed public places, workplaces and on public transport and work vehicles. The act also provided for the secretary of state to make regulations providing for work vehicles to be smoke-free. These regulations in England are the Smoke-free (Exemptions and Vehicles) Regulations 2007 (the 2007 regulations).

How does the law relate to local councils?

Many councils will own or lease vehicles which are used by staff in the course of their duties, for example by council caretakers, park rangers or those driving community vehicles. The 2007 regulations provide that an enclosed vehicle must be smoke-free if it is used in the course of paid or voluntary work by more than one person (even if those people use the vehicle at different times, or only intermittently). This means a council vehicle solely used by one person, such as a sole employee, would not be caught. A vehicle, or part of a vehicle, is 'enclosed' where it is enclosed wholly or partly by a roof and any door or window that may be opened. This would generally cover cars and buses.

If a staff member uses their own vehicle in the course of their paid work, for

example, their own car, and primarily uses the car for their own private purposes, they are not caught by the 2007 regulations.

What about councillors?

We believe the same would also apply to councillors as to paid staff.

What else?

No-smoking signs must be placed in council vehicles caught by the smoke-free legislation. A person who smokes in a non-smoking place commits an offence. Fixed penalty notices can be handed out by authorised principal authority officers if they have reason to believe a person has committed an offence. For example, two local council employees seen smoking in a council van by an enforcement officer could be issued with penalty notices. We understand this has happened to a local council employee spotted smoking

“The 2007 regulations provide that an enclosed vehicle must be smoke-free if it is used in the course of paid or voluntary work by more than one person”

while driving a council van by a relevant enforcement officer. The fact he was in the vehicle alone did not make a difference as the vehicle was used at other times by other council staff.

In addition to the possible offences for smoking in vehicles, councils should make smoking in vehicles a disciplinary matter. This should be set out clearly in council policies and publicised to staff.

For more information, including on fines, go to www.gov.uk/smoking-at-work-the-law. ■

Risk management tips for managing volunteers



Brian Brookes, risk manager at BHIB Insurance Brokers, explains why it is important to have strong volunteer management processes

A few years ago, Volunteering England and the Trades Union Congress (TUC) launched the Volunteers' Charter, which set out ten key principles to help groups and organisations demonstrate their commitment to volunteers.

One of the key principles states that "volunteers, like paid staff, should be able to carry out their duties in safe, secure and healthy environments".

Here we have written up some useful risk management tips and guidance for individuals who are in the process of setting up a voluntary group, including what to consider when arranging insurance for your volunteers.

1. **Complete a risk assessment.** This

will help you consider the risks and put in actions to reduce the risks to your volunteers. We have a generic risk assessment document so if you require assistance, please get in touch to access this.

2. **Involve your volunteers in planning.** Include volunteers in decision making around plans and policies affecting them. Having volunteers at the table will ensure that their immediate concerns are heard and addressed.
3. **Align the right volunteers with the right job.** Take advantage of volunteers' knowledge and experiences in a safe and effective way.
4. **Provide training about potential safety concerns.** Send your volunteers on first aid and CPR training. Make sure volunteers know when and how to notify staffs about unsafe conditions or potential hazards.
5. **Ensure you have the right policies in place.** Consider developing a simple volunteer policy, volunteer agreement and an induction pack. This will help to outline roles and responsibilities.

It's essential to have robust volunteer management processes in place. It helps with health and safety; it protects you financially but also makes it easier to retain and attract volunteers.

Arranging insurance for your volunteers

When you are setting up a group, you should consider the types of insurance cover needed to protect your volunteers. Your group could potentially be left vulnerable without the correct protection in place. Even with the best of intentions,

accidents can happen!

The types of insurance available to protect volunteers include:

- **Employers' liability insurance** – this provides cover for the group if a member of staff or volunteer is harmed while carrying out their duties. If you've taken out employers' liability insurance, your volunteers should also be covered under this policy. However, you should always double-check under the Employers' Liability section of your insurance policy.
- **Public liability insurance** – this covers the group and volunteers against accidental injuries or any damage that is caused to the public or their property.
- **Cyber insurance** – this covers your volunteers if they accidentally share confidential data. It also covers data breaches and hacking.

Insuring your group with BHIB

BHIB Councils Insurance specialises in providing insurance broking services for local councils. As part of our wider BHIB offering, we also specialise in providing affordable insurance broking services for charities and voluntary groups. We can provide your group with bespoke policies including cover for your volunteers.

To find out how we can help your council or voluntary organisation, email us at insurance@bhibcouncils.co.uk or call 0330 013 0036 to speak to one of our friendly team.

Please note: You may need to adapt your volunteer management processes during the coronavirus outbreak. Please get in touch with us if you have any questions. ■

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Moving to web accessibility

With new laws on website accessibility coming into force in September, Cllr Mark Harris of Cirencester Town Council explains how to approach the new requirements

The coronavirus has brought into sharp focus the importance of disseminating clear, accessible information to as many citizens as possible.

The Public Sector Bodies (Websites and Mobile Applications) Accessibility Regulations 2018 require public sector bodies, which include local councils, to ensure reasonable adjustments have been made to websites so they are accessible to people with various disabilities.

From 23 September 2020, local council websites will have to comply with those regulations. This looming requirement has

thrown many local councils into a flat spin, and it's understandable why: the standards are voluminous and technical. (Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) 2.1)

Don't panic

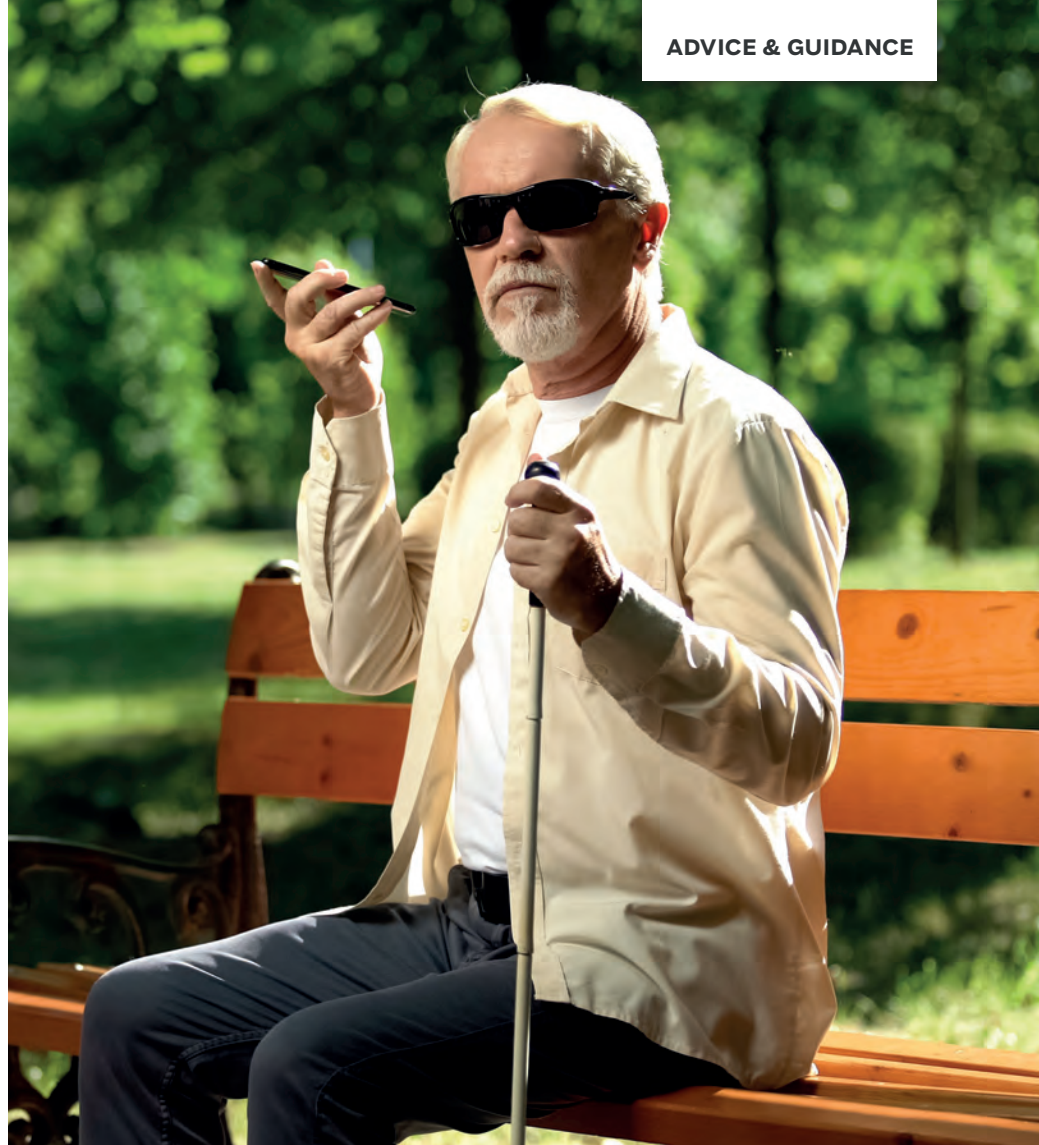
Reassuringly, the legislation provides the opportunity for local councils to draw breath. Section 6 describes the disproportionate burden assessment. In short, this does not require local councils to comply with the accessibility requirement if doing so would impose a disproportionate burden. However, councils need to assess the burden and state how their non-

compliance affects the website and what alternative provision has been made. Section 7 says this must take the form of a webpage titled Accessibility Statement.

Crucially, local councils should understand that their existing website is almost certainly mostly compliant. All councillors and clerks are advised to read the legislation (it is brief) and some sample accessibility statements.

But what happens if your website isn't fully compliant or doesn't have an accessibility statement by 23 September?

Local councils could receive requests by members of the public for compliant



information. If the council fails to do this, it could be reported to the enforcing body, in this case, the Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC). The EHRC would most likely send a letter asking the council to comply. If this is unsuccessful, the council will be requested to develop an action plan as to how it will move towards compliance.

Moving towards compliance

Waiting to be told to be compliant is not an option. Councils should strive to ensure as many citizens as possible have access to information. For that reason, a simple two-phase action plan which moves a council's website towards compliance is proposed.

Phase 1 – Evaluation

The first phase is to evaluate the council's website to establish the remedial activities that will form the second phase.

1. The first question to answer is: who will carry out the work? This could be

a company, a local resident with some web development skills or a student.

2. Councils then need to establish how much it will cost in terms of money

“Waiting to be told to be compliant is not an option. Councils should strive to ensure as many citizens as possible have access to information”

and effort. Depending on the cost, funding may well be sourced from reserves, precept or grants from charities or local authorities.

3. Councils should consider over what timescale it could carry out this work – a disproportionate burden over the coming six months may be less so over 24 months.
4. The last step is to ensure the availability

of a text-only version of the website (maybe in Word or PDF) and that your website has an accessibility statement explaining the plan, inviting feedback and pointing to alternative versions.

Phase 2 – Remedy

Having established in Phase 1 which elements need to be rectified, the same steps as above need to be repeated to determine who will do the work, the cost, timeframe and which elements might constitute a disproportionate burden. The accessibility statement should be updated to reflect the conclusion and changes to the site as the work is carried out.

If councils demonstrate they are moving towards accessibility compliance by having and publishing a plan and by having alternative documents available for those who need them, they can be comfortable in the knowledge that all citizens will have fair access to their information and services. ■

Last word

In a world turned upside down by a deadly virus, Jonathan Werran, chief executive at Localis, looks at who will shine out as an example to all, once the health crisis ends

At the start of March, I quoted in the Localis newsletter from the medical doctor who narrates Albert Camus's novel *The Plague*. Dr Rieux, a rational sort of chap, observes that in times of epidemic, "there is more to admire in men than to despise".

Pushing on two months later, the sentiment holds up. You only have to rattle a tin or cup every Thursday evening at eight o'clock to hear the public applause for our frontline health workers. The country has moved on from hoarding to lauding.

And the role of local councils in leading communities has been noted by policy nerds as being worthy of a more extensive hearing. The range of bottom-up initiatives listed in NALC's stupendous collection of coronavirus case studies is truly inspiring in the breadth of scope, innovation and dedication. Across 148 pages, we see detailed the value of local councils as the courageous, beating heart of genuine local

"The initiatives listed in NALC's stupendous collection of coronavirus case studies is truly inspiring in the breadth of scope, innovation and dedication. Across 148 pages, we see detailed the value of local councils as the courageous, beating heart of genuine local self-government"

self-government. From my own personal interest, I am glad to see how Launceston Town Council in Cornwall can offer assistance to my parents, both of whom are in their eighties.

The coronavirus pandemic has ruthlessly exposed, like nothing else, the balance and

anatomy of power in contemporary society. Top of the order come the higher orders of the NHS bureaucracy. Beyond this, the line stretches to business, big then small. Local government and communities as entities in their own right, as opposed to delivery arms of an interventionist central state, come a big way down – but not, to paraphrase Barack Obama "at the back of the queue". And possibly a head above the more neglected voluntary sector.

We don't need to await the inevitable inquiry to know that the central state has not had a good pandemic. Whitehall has been cocooned in its own disconnected and inverted reality in which the local, because it is not understood, has no value.

The consequences have been delay, duplication and frustration, which have deepened the social impact of the pandemic. Meanwhile, local councils and voluntary community groups have got on with rising to the challenges of protecting the vulnerable within their midst and reconfiguring neighbourhood services without the need to be asked, cajoled or patronised from on high.

Looking ahead

But in the likely future, and the absence of funding, time and listening, the onus for all parts of the local government family is once more an emphasis on standing alone through self-reliance. How this is to be achieved in the depths of depression at a time we were meant to be turning on the spending taps after a decade of austerity is the \$64m question to which not even 'Dishy' Rishi has an answer.

Something or someone has to give – for the sake of preserving civic life and social infrastructure. Localis has previously investigated the gap between what people are willing to contribute towards funding local services and what they fund now – which we define as goodwill. This can be monetised provided we take account of local preferences.

When we posed this question in 2018, six issues had majority support as voluntary levies: helping older people to live independently for longer; support for local homeless people; improving disability access; repairing potholes; reducing loneliness; and reducing anti-social behaviour.

"Domestically, in the game of humanitarian competition, local councils are in a league of their own. They might not receive weekly rounds of public applause or have folk walking laps of honour – but they deserve a winner's medal"

Finding and fixing the funding and service gaps, creating and measuring greater social value and securing grants or low-cost loans from principal authorities or government to secure local assets and services as part of 'co-investment' would also be helpful. This is all good policy.

Ultimately, however, the behaviour and example of public-spirited decency of our local councils will shine out as a beacon of hope, and as a guide for Whitehall and the wider world to learn from and follow. It's been instructive to learn from Germany, South Korea and New Zealand and different international and regional approaches to dealing with the crisis. Domestically, in the game of humanitarian competition – a game for good in which different parts of the public sector and wider world find inspiration from the strong intentions and outcomes of their peers in improving people's lives – local councils are in a league of their own. They might not receive weekly rounds of public applause or have folk walking laps of honour – but they deserve a winner's medal. ■



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