

IMPROVEMENT AND DEVELOPMENT BOARD | AGENDA

16 November 2023, 11:00 – 13:00.

The meeting will be open from 10:50 for pre-meeting conversations and to resolve any technological issues. If the meeting extends beyond 12.00 there will be a short comfort break and the meeting will then continue if necessary.

Via Zoom.

1. Apologies and absence

2. Minutes from previous meeting and matters arising

- 2.1. Recommended action: to approve the minutes of the last meeting of the Improvement and Development Board held on 16 March 2023.

Appendix 2.1

3. Introductions

- 3.1. Board to welcome the new independent Chair, James Alexander.

4. Forward Work Programme

- 4.1 Board to discuss and agree the forward work programme for 2023/24 (previous work programme for 2022/23 attached for reference).

Appendix 4.1

5. Developing new Improvement Strategy

- 5.1 Board to discuss the development of a new improvement strategy – Link to previous strategy can be found here: [National Improvement Strategy](#)

Appendix 5.1
(To Follow)

6. Update on IDB programmes and Civility & Respect project

- 6.1 Board to receive updates on various projects/programmes.
To include:

- NALC Improvements
- Civility and Respect project
- SLCC

Appendix 6.1
Verbal report
Verbal report

- LGA

Verbal report

7. Meeting dates for 2024



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APPENDIX 2.1 IMPROVEMENT AND DEVELOPMENT BOARD | DRAFT MINUTES

16 March 2023

Present:

Cllr Keith Stevens, NALC national Chair; Helen Quick, SLCC head of conferences, training & education; Wendy Amis, Derbyshire county officer; Alison Robinson, Gloucestershire county officer; Cllr Richard Parry, Kent Association of Local Councils; Adam Keppel-Green, SLCC branch rep; Sally Longmate, Suffolk county officer; Sue Hobbs, SLCC and Mia Shelton, LGA Senior Advisor - Improvement & Policy.

Also present:

Charlotte Eisenhart, NALC head of member services, Anders Hanson, NALC member services manager and Lisa Etchell, NALC projects officer.

1. Apologies for absence

Apologies were received from Jonathan Owen, NALC chief executive and Rob Smith, SLCC chief executive.

The Chair offered words of condolences to family, friends and work colleagues of Board member Pauline Whitehead, SLCC who sadly passed away in February. Pauline was the CiLCA Lead Officer and a Community Governance module tutor. The Board held a minutes' silence as a mark of respect.

2. Minutes from previous meeting and matters arising

The minutes of the meeting held on 17 November 2022 were approved.

No matters arising.

3. Discussion Item: Future of IDB and linking to Civility & Respect project

- 3.1 Board was invited to discuss the future of IDB and its involvement with the Civility and Respect project (Board TOR's circulated with agenda).

Charlotte Eisenhart reported that the Civility & Respect project was currently overseen by the Project Assurance Board (PAB), which recently met to discuss its future. As this project overlapped with areas of remit

already under the Board, such as intervention/workforce there was an opportunity to look at the Board's current structure and scope of operation.

NALC were currently recruiting for a new Project Manager to continue the good work of the project and to keep up the momentum and drive that had shaped it so far. She welcomed members views on whether the PAB should continue to have oversight of the project and to explore any opportunities and risks.

Various members agreed there was an obvious link to the Board's current strands of work, but that this subject would benefit from further clarity and discussions. It was suggested that members could take part in a focus session to help inform views.

Cllr Keith Stevens suggested that the PAB should still report to the Board while members worked out the best way forward in how to connect the various strands of work. He also highlighted that NALC and SLCC were committed to funding the Civility & Respect project.

Charlotte Eisenhart agreed there was a need to look at how partners were brought together, how current success could be built upon and to reflect on areas for improvement. In the interim, until a Project Manager has been recruited, she would get proposals together and action next steps within a month. The Board's TOR's and meeting frequency times also needed to be reviewed.

Resolved: The Board agreed to proceed with the advert for Chair and to confirm with PAB stakeholders that the Civility & Respect Project be included under the committee's overview, and to initiate a meeting for further discussions between NALC, members and partners to agree a way forward.

4. Discussion Item: Review of NALC policy on councillor training

4.1 Board was invited to discuss and consider whether councillor training should be mandatory, focusing on the following questions:

- Should training be compulsory?
- If yes, why?
- How can this be achieved?
- What issues need to be addressed?

- If no, why?
- How can training be encouraged/supported?
- What issues need to be addressed?

Chris Borg reported that NALC's Policy committee requested a review of its policy on councillor training in January. The previous position had been that training should not be mandatory but strongly encouraged.

Sector wide engagement was currently taking place, including with various committees and networks. All views will be gathered by the end of April and be taken to the Policy Committee meeting in June.

Once NALC had identified a clear majority view, then the committee would either recommend retaining the current position or to put forward a motion to take to NALC's AGM meeting in October. He asked members if they were happy to vote either 'in favour' or not 'in favour' of mandatory training.

Sue Hobbs recommended the reading of a dissertation paper previously written by a Community Governance student which included research on the subject, to help inform views.

ACTION: LE to circulate dissertation paper to CB.

Various members expressed discomfort with voting on such a complex matter and with not enough time for consideration. The issue of enforcing mandatory training was highlighted as particularly challenging.

Charlotte Eisenhart suggested members could just give their feedback without voting, while stressing the Board's strong commitment to training via learning resources such as LCAS, E-Learning, Good councillors Guide etc.

Mia Shelton advised that the LGA had encountered similar views on enforcement. It's current position was to highlight the value of training and encourage uptake through supportive opportunities such as the peer challenge.

Chris Borg took note of members comments and recognised that the Board's current view was that training should be encouraged, rather than mandatory.

5. The Future of Local Councils report

- 5.1 Board was invited to note the report and results of the survey conducted by SLCC and Local Governance Research Centre (LGRC):
<https://www.slcc.co.uk/future>

Members requested further discussions around the report to help shape future work. To be deferred to next meeting when SLCC will invite Jonathan Rose, co-director at the LGRC to attend.

Resolved: The Board noted the report and results of survey conducted by SLCC and Local Governance Research Centre (LGRC) and agreed to further discuss at the next meeting of the Board.

6. Councils: raising the standard

Intervention

- 6.1 The Board received an update on engagement with Staveley Town Council and Chesterfield Borough Council

Charlotte Eisenhart reported that Staveley Town Council had received a finance resource package from Chesterfield Borough Council, due to unprecedented levels of debt and financial difficulties. Part of the rescue terms included an improvement board which NALC was helping to set up.

Although this was an opportunity to think of national intervention options, it was likely to mean a long-term impact for parish council borrowing, as other borough councils may begin to view parish risks in a different light. NALC would continue to engage with DLUHC and flag any risks or ramifications.

Various members highlighted the importance of audit checks/balances and regular training.

Peer Challenge

- 6.2 The Board received an update on the peer challenge, including reviews and support.

Anders Hanson reported that NALC were working with the LGA to undertake two corporate peer challenges in 2022-3. Cirencester Town

Council's had taken place last year with the report and action plan now published. The second would commence next week at Morecambe Town Council, Lancashire. He noted the positive and valuable oversight the process had so far provided.

Sally Longmate queried whether there was a framework that could be provided for use at a local level. Anders suggested the possibility of a tailor-made model could be looked at, if there was enough interest from members.

Mia Shelton advised that the LGA were keen to progress peer challenges, offering support for up to 5 in total. She signposted the Corporate Peer Challenge report on the LGA website as a good reference. Checks would be made regarding sharing the framework with prospective or new peers.

ACTION: LE to circulate Cirencester Town Council's peer challenge report with the meeting minutes.

NALC update on Improvement Matters

6.3 The board received an update from Anders Hanson on various project areas and improvement matters as outlined in the report. Key points included:

- Local Council Award Scheme: 21 applications in current round (x 5 Quality Gold, x 6 Quality and x 10 Foundation). Panel assessments currently underway, with results due in April. New management system to improve scheme process currently under design, along with documentation review.
- Online Learning: Online enrolment for short courses offered via Nimble platform launched. Three additional civility and respect courses now available. New page to be created on NALC website with further details.
- Corporate Peer Challenge: NALC working with LGA to undertake two corporate peer challenges in 2022-3. Cirencester Town Council's peer challenge completed end of 2022 with report/next steps now published. Next peer challenge will be taking place this month at Morecambe Town Council, Lancashire.

- Publications & Briefings: New edition of Good Councillor's Guide to Being a Good Employer due to be updated by 24 May. Work underway to update Local Councils Explained.

Wendy Amis queried the timetable for the LCAS documentation review.

ACTION: CE to confirm LCAS review timetable and update at next meeting of Board.

The Board welcomed the corporate peer challenges and the new Civility & Respect online courses and looked forward to the updated publications and future report on the LCAS review.

7. Officers: professional development

- 7.1 The board received a verbal update from Helen Quick on CiLCA and FiLCA statistics and improvements. She echoed words of condolences in respect of the sad loss of SLCC colleague Pauline Whitehead. She reported that:

ILCA and FiLCA have remained consistent with last years' trends, with a high number of new clerks embarking on them at early employment.

CiLCA Stats (totals up to 6 March) as follows:

Pre 2015: 2378 passed; 2015 Portfolio: 820 passed with 1163 Registrations, 2021 Portfolio: 202 passed with 649 Registrations (England), 20 passed with 68 Registrations (Wales). CiLCA 2015 will be closed shortly.

In relation to Community Governance, 59 students had registered at the start of 2023. In response to a fall in Level 4 intakes, marketing was being reviewed with plans to increase face to face promotion at regional/county level.

The first study days of the academic year had been held in Jan/Feb, with the teaching team now comprising of 10 tutors. SLCC hoped to initiate discussions with DMU over whether its MA programme in Public Leadership and Management could at a future time be delivered through the SLCC partnership programme.

The new course leader for Community Governance was now Angie Hurren, with Elisabeth Skinner MBE and Jonathan Bourne as senior support tutors.

- 7.2 Sue Hobbs gave an update on SLCC improvement matters. She reported that recent discussions by the CiLCA operations group centred around the CiLCA fee increase, encouragement of Community Governance Level 4 intake and barriers to funding. She asked members if they had a view on any source of funding or partnership working that could be accessed, to help support this qualification.

Sally Longmate signposted her to the government's 'UK Shared Prosperity Fund'.

- 7.3 Charlotte Eisenhart gave an update on the Workforce Strategy. She reported that:

- The National Strategy Advisory Group meeting had been postponed but was expected to take place soon.
- Review of the temporary contract of employment for staff was in progress and further updates would be provided.
- The LGA workforce survey report was being looked at in depth, but progress was slower than expected.
- The Good Councillor Guide update was taking shape and expected to be published in early April.

Members highlighted the need to ensure the Good Councillor Guide was available as a dynamic, online document with regular reviews to ensure information was always up to date.

8. County Officers: professional development

- 8.1 A CALC update and county association workstream from Sally Longmate was circulated with the agenda. Key themes were outlined as follows:

- **County Officer Development Programme:** Poll currently establishing priority list of workshops/briefings to be led by volunteer CO's. Various topics covered include managing staff, strategy/business planning and understanding requirements for GDPR, FOI etc.

- **Communication Strategy:** New extranet site 'ALC K-Hub' has been rolled out. Various functions include a document library, chat forum and project area for members. 'Lunch and Learn' online introductory sessions to take place late March.
- **Back Office Management Systems:** A number of CA's now implementing JAMS (Junari Association Management System). Suffolk experimenting with allowing other ALC's to access the member portal.
- **Legal Support:** Legal User Group analysing results of UK wide survey estimating councils spend on legal services. Update to NALC provided in due course.

9. Updates on improvement and development initiatives

9.1 LGA

The Board received a verbal update from Mia Shelton on LGA matters. She reported that the LGA were expecting an agreement on the DLUHC's improvement grant in April.

Current LGA key priorities included a focus on leadership (officer/councillor development), council finances (intervention/peer review) and assurance (development/training). The DLUHC minister had indicated transformation was a major priority for the department, which included an emphasis on data and digitalisation.

In respect of peer challenges, the LGA would continue to work with colleagues and offer opportunities for training. The process was also being reviewed to see if it was adding value and supporting/delivering for councils.

Support was increasing for the 'Make a Change' campaign along with various other events to encourage take up. Members were reminded there were a range of tools, learning materials and helpful case studies on the LGA website, including on equalities/cost of living. The LGA conference will be held on 4th July in Bournemouth and members were encouraged to attend.

Sally Longmate requested any documents or guidance that could assist with the implementation of digital transformation. Mia advised she would check with the LGA cyber team.

9.2 **DLUHC**

No update given as NALC were currently awaiting the DLUHC to confirm a new representative.

10. IDB Forward work programme

10.1 The board noted the work programme for 2022/23 (Appendix 10.1 attached).

Sally Longmate requested that the motion passed last year at NALC's AGM (from Northamptonshire CALC) in relation to workforce challenges, be included as an item on the work programme for future discussion and development.

Charlotte Eisenhart invited members to contact her with any further item suggestions.

Resolved: That the work programme for 2022/23 should be carried forward.

The next meeting of the Improvement and Development Board will be on 21 June 2023.



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APPENDIX 4.1 IDB 2022/23 WORK PROGRAMME | IMPROVEMENT AND DEVELOPMENT BOARD

Q1: April-June | Q2: July-Sept | Q3: Oct-Dec | Q4: Jan-March

Recruit chair	
Q1	Specify role etc and agree at IDB
Q2	
Q3	Advertise role and interviews
Q4	Appointment of chair

Devolution/ levelling up	
Q1	
Q2	
Q3	Depending on new PM's priorities: - Assess and agree I@D requirements emerging from white-paper - DLUHC funding bid
Q4	

Peer review and support	
Q1	Recruit peers and identify peer councils
Q2	Feedback from Bingham pilot. Train peers, prep for.
Q3	Peer review 1 – Review taking place at Cirencester TC (1 st week November)
Q4	Peer review 2

Workforce strategy	
Q1	
Q2	
Q3	Survey & Strategy workshop with LGA
Q4	Commission & consult on strategy

Promoting CiLCA, LCAS and GPC	
Q1	
Q2	
Q3	All phases including developing 'three-pronged approach' and marketing/publicising to be moved to Q1 2023 – for further discussion and progression.
Q4	

Review and update of training material (LCE, Good councillor guides, CiLCA training guides etc)	
Q1	
Q2	
Q3	
Q4	Mapping: Identify and prioritise review schedules/ identify gaps etc. Updated Being a Good Employer and SLCC CPD guide for clerks

Future agenda item suggestions	Author /Originator	Target date	Board meeting dates 2023
Communications – How we can better work together	?		- 16 Nov
Knowledge bank	?		
Civility and Respect project	NALC/SLCC	Further updates and clarification of relationships required	
Apprenticeships – Incorporate in the workforce strategy	?		
New template contract/refresh of job evaluation scheme – Incorporate in the workforce strategy	NALC		
Board members are invited to identify other matters			



16 NOVEMBER 2023

APPENDIX 6.1 MEMBER SERVICES REPORT | IMPROVEMENT AND DEVELOPMENT BOARD

This is a summary of some of the current work being undertaken by the member services team.

Local Council Award Scheme

The second round of the award scheme for 2023 completed in August and consisted of 13 applicants, with 11 awarded and 2 results still pending.

The third round of this year commenced in early September and we received a total of 21 applications (6 Quality Gold, 6 Quality and 9 Foundation). These comprise of 9 town councils and 12 parish councils of mainly large and medium size. Assessments for all applications in this round are due to take place throughout November. Results will be given in early December.

We've now successfully recruited a new Triage team member and a number of new voluntary panel members to the scheme. This flows into our intention to grow the scheme and have in place good resources to deal with increased application levels.

To further improve the administration process, the implementation of the new data management system is nearing completion. There is also a planned review of the scheme criteria and documents. Further updates will be provided to the Board.

The deadlines for next year's award scheme are published here: [Local Council Award Scheme 2024 Dates](#)

Online learning

We continue to offer short online courses via the Nimble E-learning platform. There are now 21 Nimble essentials courses, 4 bespoke civility and respect courses with a further 4 generic courses that are relevant to the topic, 4 IT and online skills courses, and 3 bespoke courses on local councils. Each course is priced at £16 and the income is split between NALC, the county association, the course author, and Nimble E-learning.

Since the start of 2023, there have been 373 new learners and 415 course enrolments. Learners can enrol through online enrolment - nimble-elearning.com - or in some cases via their county association.

Corporate peer challenge

We are working with the LGA to undertake up to five corporate peer challenges in 2023-4. These are being fully funded by the LGA and are designed to help and support councils to improve further, rather than being there to assess and judge how they operate. As well as looking at the council more broadly, the peers will also consider specific areas of their work that the council has said they would like to develop. We are currently in discussions with several 'super-councils' who have expressed an interest in taking part in the current financial year, as well as a few who would like to take part in future years.

Over the previous financial year, we undertook two corporate peer challenges with [Cirencester Town Council](#) in Gloucestershire and [Morecambe Town Council](#) in Lancashire. Their reports can be viewed by clicking on the links. Both councils have published their action plans, and a progress review was recently held with Cirencester. Morecambe's progress review will take place in February.

Publications and briefings

The new edition of our [Good Councillor's Guide to Being a Good Employer](#) was published earlier in the year and is available to download from the members' area of the website or as a hard copy. We are currently working on a revised template contract of employment and revised financial regulations. We are also in the process of identifying an author and putting together a project plan for an updated version of Local Councils Explained.

Website

We are continuing to work on developing a new NALC website which will make accessing our resources significantly easier. NALC staff are currently revising existing content, and, in some cases, it is being entirely rewritten. The new website will be launched in the first half of next year.