

LARGER COUNCILS COMMITTEE| AGENDA

Date and time: 6 February 2024 10.00 – Noon

Location: Zoom

Any member wishing to submit an apology for this meeting please contact NALC at NALCcommittees@nalc.gov.uk.

(Please note there will be a short ten-minute comfort break at 11.00)

DECISION ITEMS (10:00 a.m. – 11:00 a.m.)

1. Welcome & apologies [10:00 a.m. – 10:02 a.m., an officer]

- 1.1 Welcome to the session (committee chair).
- 1.2 To receive any apologies (committee chair)

2. Minutes and notes arising from previous committee sessions on 31 October 2023 and 14 December 2023 [10:02 a.m. – 10:05 a.m.]

- 2.1. To approve the minutes of the meeting held on 31 October 2023 – appendix 2.1.
- 2.2. To note the notes of the short governance session of the committee on 14 December 2023 – appendix 2.2.

3. Work plan 2024-25 [10:05 - 10:30]

- 3.1 To consider a report on the committee's work plan to deliver the National Assembly work programme/priorities for 2024/25 – see appendix 3.1

4. Co-options and additional expertise [10:30 – 11:00 a.m.]

- 4.1 To identify proposals for co-options and securing additional expertise to the committee, as needed.

To have a coffee break between 11:00 a.m. and 11:10 a.m.

DISCUSSION ITEMS (11:10 – 11:30)

5. SAAA update (11:10 – 11:30)

5.1 To receive a verbal update on SAAA current work projects and implications for larger councils – Annie Child, chief executive at SAAA.

INFORMATION ITEMS (11:30 – Noon)

6. Member services update (11:30 – 11:45)

6.1 Introduction to NALC's member services – Charlotte Eisenhart, head of member services.

6.2 Launch of the new model and template contracts of employment for local councils – the committee is asked to note the [launch](#) of these new documents.

6.3 Local Council Award Scheme criteria review (item to note, appendix 6.1)

7. Martyn's law update (11:45 – 11:50 a.m.)

7.1 To receive a short update from Shar Roselman on the inception meeting of the Martyn's Law Steering Group on 21 November 2023.

8. NALC National Networks (11:50 a.m. - Noon)

8.1 To receive an update on the NALC National Networks for Super Councils, Coastal Communities and Climate Emergency – appendices 8.1 – 8.2.

9. Date and time of next committee meeting (Noon)

The next session of the committee will take place in person from 11:00 to 15:00 on Tuesday 30 April 2024 in Meeting Room 4, The Office Group, The Bloomsbury Building, 10 Bloomsbury Way, Holborn, London WC1A 2SL.

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Appendix 2.1

LARGER COUNCILS COMMITTEE | DRAFT MINUTES

Meeting of the Larger Councils Committee on 31 October 2023 at 10.00 taking place by Zoom.

Present (online):

Councillors Peter Astell (committee vice chair), Phil Barnett, Paul Harvey (committee chair), Katharine Keats Rohan (for part); and directly elected clerks, Carl Hearn and Shar Roselman (for part).

Staff present: Chris Borg (policy manager), Charlotte Eisenhart (head of member services, for part) and Justin Griggs (head of policy and communications).

Other guests in attendance: Charlotte Lewis and Natalie Turner (Centre for Ageing Better) (for part).

1. Centre for Ageing Better

The committee received a presentation from Charlotte Lewis of the Centre for Ageing Better. The slides summarised the work the Centre was undertaking, working with principal authorities and others, to identify the needs of the ageing population, where help is needed and what type of support is most required. The Centre has most recently met with NALC and there was a wish to work more closely with larger local councils; this was supported by the Committee.

Resolved: That Natalie Turner and Charlotte Lewis be thanked for their presentation and the slides circulated with the notes of the session; that NALC continue to work with Centre for Ageing Better in the future such as through encouraging larger councils to sign up to the World Health Organisation framework and to become age friendly areas, and on engagement with the NALC National Network: Super councils.

2. Apologies

Apologies were received from Cllr Mike Drew (NALC vice chair member services) and Jane Biscombe.

Resolved: That the apologies be noted.

3. Minutes and notes of previous meetings

Resolved: That the draft minutes from the formal committee session of 18 May 2023 be noted, and full notes of the informal committee workshop of 25 July 2023 be noted.

4. Review of committee workshop on 25 July 2023

The Policy Manager summarised the full set of workshop notes including group discussions. There was a general discussion in which several issues were highlighted.

Member commitment to the committee was a concern it had been noted that the attendance from committee members for the meeting was poor, as it had been on other occasions. It was noted there were 6 vacancies to the committee due largely to the council elections on 4 May 2023. The creation of the Super Councils Network was identified as only a minor contributory factor.

The Committee reiterated its expectation that a new committee intake would see greater commitment from committee members for the 2024-25 tenure and it should consider how to ensure it can function more effectively. This should include a review the committee's terms of reference and current definition of larger councils as those with an annual budgeted precept or turnover of greater than £600,000 per year.

It was also noted that the government's proposed review of neighbourhood governance would be now take the form of a much narrower piece of work to include an update to guidance on community governance reviews and change to parish polls regulations to be complete by Summer 2024.

Resolved: That NALC work with the Committee to ensure better attendance at committee meetings, more effective functioning of the Committee and to consider the definition of a larger council.

There was a short comfort break from 11:05 to 11:15.

5. Member services update

The head of member services provided an update on the work undertaken on workforce and employment issues recently. The committee identified guidance for managing outdoor workers, and an updated job evaluation scheme would be of particular interest and impact for larger councils, and it was agreed that would be factored into the workplan for 2023.

Resolved: That the written report and verbal update be noted.

The member services manager provided an overview of the NALC/Local Government Association (LGA) corporate peer challenge programme. In recent years a peer challenge team had visited Falmouth, Chippenham, Cirencester, and Morecambe town councils, where visits are usually for two days, and eligible for Super Councils only. The LGA has now increased its support to five corporate peer challenges in this financial year with the aim of continuing this number in future years, budget permitting. The committee fed back that sharing of documents and the learning from these activities would be very useful in terms of sharing good practice.

Resolved: That the verbal update be noted.

6. Policy positions update

The policy manager gave a short verbal update on NALC's recent responses to government consultations on local plan making, permitted development rights and hedgerows which were available on the NALC website.

Resolved: That the verbal update be noted.

The Policy Manager reported that the Committee's previous decision on NALC's approach to working with the Society of Local Council Clerks on Martyn's Law, included the creation of a small steering group. This would comprise officers from NALC and SLCC plus a representative of Policy Committee, Larger Councils Committee, Smaller Councils Committee, and a county officer. The purpose of the group would be help inform and steer our engagement and advocacy with the Government and Parliament on the legislation and the development of advice, guidance, and other support for councils.

Resolved: That Shar Roselman act as the committee's representative on the new Martyn's Law steering group, with the current committee chair as a fallback.

The Policy Manager outlined work underway by the Policy Committee to explore the development of a new threshold for triggering by-elections at local councils and reform to parish polls. He added that NALC's National Network: Super councils and the committee had inputted to date and a proposal would be considered by the Policy Committee in January 2024. Parish polls had been discussed at the most recent NALC National Network: Super councils and our current position had been added to the NALC policy register and would be the basis for our engagement with the government on this issue.

Resolved: That the update be noted.

7. Associate membership of the Local Government Association

The Policy manager set out the status of the NALC offer to Super Councils for associate membership of the LGA. He also explained the process and current levels through NALC of LGA associate membership, currently at its highest total of 8 excluding during its piloting.

Resolved: That the verbal update and written report be noted.

8. NALC National Networks

The policy manager provided a summary of the recent meetings of the NALC's national networks on the Climate Emergency Network and Super Councils, adding that dates for 2024/25 were currently being developed.

Resolved: That the verbal update be noted.

9. Review of 2022-23 committee tenure

The committee chair invited all attending committee members to share their experiences of being on the committee over the last 2 years. Feedback was broadly positive and suggestions for improvement included the need for the committee to have a mission statement, the committee being expanded as a way of engaging with more councils, NALC should keep under review organising a dedicated event for larger councils, the study tour was a good way to bring councils together and should be retained, encouraging regional groupings of county associations to work together to arrange their own larger council events and conferences, sharing good practice was identified as being particularly relevant and ways to enhance this explored, and the committee should continue to support piloting of an extension to the remit Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman, and the retention of in person committee workshop each year.

10. Date and time of next meeting

Thursday 14 December 2023 from 10:00 to 12:00 noon via Zoom.

Cllr Paul Harvey, committee chair
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Appendix 2.2

Note of governance session for incoming committee – 14 December 2023

- Item 1 – election of chair – Cllr Iain Hamilton duly elected as committee chair for 2024-5.
- Item 2 – election of vice chair – Cllr Mike Drew duly elected as committee vice chair for 2024-5.
- Item 3.1 – all members were encouraged to read their role profiles setting out the roles and responsibilities of NALC committee members.
- Item 3.2 – all members were encouraged to read NALC’s committees process document agreed by National Assembly.
- Item 3.3 – all members were encouraged to read the committee’s terms of reference, the NALC constitution and agenda and minutes from recent sessions of the committee for context.
- Item 4 – it was confirmed that the in-person session of the committee for the 2024-25 financial year will take place on 30 April 2024 in London, venue to be confirmed.

Contact officer: Chris Borg, policy manager T: 07714 771049 e. chris.borg@nalc.gov.uk
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Appendix 3.1

Committee work plan 2024-25

1. **Purpose of report**

2. For direction.

3. **Summary**

4. This report summarises the committee's proposed projects and programmes for the 2024/25 cycle.

5. **Recommendation**

6. That the committee comments on and agrees the activity, including the proposals in 13-23, for recommendation to Management Board.

7. **Financial implications**

8. All commitments can be met from the within existing staffing resources and budget; some new proposals may have to be considered for the next financial year.

9. **Background**

10. The meeting of National Assembly on 29 November agreed proposals to develop a two-year work programme for 2024/25.

11. The work programme would comprise:

- current themes and campaigns of climate change, health and wellbeing, young people, make a change, and planning, with a focused piece of work identified for each.
- a new theme of community safety.
- other areas of sector financial resilience, workforce issues and strategy, sector risk register, NALC manifesto, artificial Intelligence, data and a membership survey.

12. Following discussions with the committee chair, officers have developed a draft work plan to deliver the National Assembly work programme and committee terms of reference.

13. **Artificial intelligence & cyber security**

- NNN: Super councils.
- Online event – July 2024.
- Gauge impact of AI on larger councils (use of predictive analytics+) and whether / when any of them using it.
- Attempt to gauge financial impact of AI use on larger / Super councils.

- Continue extended offer of pilot scheme for Super councils of advice and guidance on cyber security from the National Cyber Security Centre.

14. **Sharing good practice**

- Study visit 2024 – Yate Town Council, youth engagement theme, sold out.
- Study visit 2025 – to take place on 27-28 May 2025 (location and theme TBC).
- Quarterly Zoom sessions and survey of Super Councils Network to inform how best to share good practice amongst circa 100 Super councils.
- Continue to promote take-up amongst Super Councils of corporate peer challenge programme organised between Local Government Association and NALC.
- NNN: Coastal towns.
- NNN: Climate Emergency.

15. **Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman**

- Continue to lobby government for pilot extension of Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman to Super Councils in first instance.

16. **Devolution**

- Devolution online event – November 2024.
- Create list of areas where recent Devolution Deals have taken place, draft and issue short survey to be issued to larger councils in those areas via their county associations, and gauge levels of engagement and consultation (based on Lancashire experience).

17. **Market towns**

- Continue to gather evidence and be vocal to government on main issues germane to market town councils – e.g. high street decline (promote funding chances), banking.

18. **Community safety**

- Martyn's Law steering group – continue committee representation on that group in 2024.
- Inclusion of larger and Super council case studies in new case studies publication for community safety web page to be developed.

19. **Workforce issues and strategy**

- Be an open door for the committee to feed its views direct to Member Services on impact of workforce issues and strategy on larger and Super councils.

20. **Sector financial resilience**

- Continue to make the case for larger and Super councils to have flexible and diverse funding.
- Future of local government finance online event – April 2024.

21. **Data**

- Continue to make the case for extension of OFLOG remit to cover local councils, suggested initial pilot to cover Super councils in medium term.
- Develop suite of themes for data metrics on local (including larger and Super) councils.

22. **Creation of new councils (including in new towns and community stewardship organisations)**

- Continue to promote the creation of new local (larger and Super councils) via triggering of community governance reviews in all un-parished areas of England.

23. **External speakers for Committee meetings**

- Chief executive of SAAA.
- Government officials.
- Local Government Association.
- Relevant MPs.

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Appendix 6.1

Local Council Award Scheme criteria review – paper for Larger Councils Committee

NALC has announced the launch of a consultation as part of the Local Council Award Scheme (LCAS) criteria review. This is an important exercise to ensure that the scheme continues to be fit for purpose and reflects best practice for councils of all sizes. This paper encourages members of both the Larger Councils Committee and Smaller Councils Committee to engage with this consultation and help ensure that the voices of the councils these committees represent are heard in the consultation.

[Complete the form](#)

The Local Council Award Scheme celebrates the successes of the best local (parish and town) councils and provides a framework to support all local councils in improving and developing their full potential. As part of continued improvements to the scheme and a commitment to raising standards in local councils, NALC is seeking views on how the scheme's criteria and guidance can be improved.

The scheme consists of three award levels:

- The Quality Gold Award demonstrates that a council aspires to excellence and is at the forefront of best practice by achieving a high standard in Community Governance, Leadership and Performance Management.
- The Quality Award demonstrates that a council achieves good practice in governance, community engagement and council improvement, going beyond its legal obligations and continuously seeking opportunities to improve and develop.
- The Foundation Award demonstrates that a council has the required documentation and information to operate lawfully and according to standard practice and has the foundations and policies for improvement and development in place.

NALC encourages councillors, county associations, clerks, other interested parties, and those already involved with the scheme to put forward their ideas and suggestions by participating in the consultation. It will then help inform improvements moving forward. The consultation closes **on 20 March 2024**. If you have any queries, contact NALC at localcouncilawardscheme@nalc.gov.uk.

Contact officer: Anders Hanson, member services manager

Appendix 8.1

Note from NNN: Climate Emergency session – 19 October 2023

Welcome, introduction and context

Chris Borg, policy manager at NALC, opened the meeting by welcoming everyone and providing a brief overview of the agenda.

Selection of volunteer co-chair

Cllr David Newman Blackbird Leys Parish Council, Oxfordshire was appointed as co-chair of the Climate Emergency Network network for 2024.

Your views

a) Place Based Initiative

Andrew Maliphant introduced an item on the Place Based Initiative, which had been incorporated on 1 August as a company limited by guarantee. Andrew had sent round details of the Great Collaboration, a website developed by the Herefordshire Green Network that features up to 60 different actions individuals can take in response to climate change and nature recovery. The Herefordshire Green Network had now handed over the website to the Place Based Initiative, who will extend its use all over the country.

Andrew explained that the Place Based Initiative was now planning a crowd funding appeal, with half the money going towards hiring a network officer and the other half towards central resources. Anyone who wanted to get involved was welcome to do so.

Andrew confirmed he would look into the security of the Great Collaboration website, as Microsoft had flagged it as a potential security risk.

b) Local Net Zero Forum Task and Finish Group session update

Andrew Maliphant gave an update on the Local Net Zero Forum Task and Finish Group. The Department for Energy, Security and Net Zero had put together a three year pilot with the Combined Authorities in Manchester and Birmingham on domestic retrofit and was now looking at the rest of the Net Zero agenda. A first meeting had taken place to see how that might be done and at least four sub groups were being set up, including on strategic design approach, the key issues that need to be addressed, outcomes to help government achieve Net Zero and enabling local authorities to achieve Net Zero faster.

The group was conscious that the current grant funding schemes were not easy to apply for and were aiming to make applying for them more straightforward.

Andrew agreed to keep the network informed on the group's progress moving forwards. Network members were invited to get involved in the working groups but membership of the main forum was limited.

A summary of the discussion relating to this item is as follows:

- How can money be trickled down to local (parish and town) councils to help them carry out what needs to be done?
- NALC had written to a previous minister to ask for local councils to be apply to apply for funding
- The Place Based Initiative was looking to put digital mapping on the Great Collaboration
- The forum doesn't currently have a strategic plan for how it addresses it's business

c) Biodiversity Politics

Chris Borg introduced an item on Biodiversity Politics by explaining that NALC had received queries from two county associations asking whether it had a biodiversity policy. Chris had shared with them links containing resources relating to biodiversity, but NALC didn't currently have a policy as such.

Andrew Maliphant explained that the government had issued new guidance on biodiversity net gain that included local councils, however they weren't obliged to produce a report. There wasn't currently a briefing setting out what local councils could do, however suggested actions included considering biodiversity when commenting on planning applications, getting more involved in local situations and having an action plan.

Andrew had produced a first draft document setting out what local councils could do, which would be finalised by November and uploaded to the NALC website, along with documents on climate action for smaller councils and planning.

A summary of the discussion relating to this item is as follows:

- How will the biodiversity net action plan be policed?
- Can a local council claim biodiversity as it's action plan?
- Do neighbourhood plans and community grants count towards councils including biodiversity in all its actions.

Whatsapp group links and posts

Katherine Keats Rohan confirmed that the links posted on the network Whatsapp group since July 2023 had been shared along with the meeting agenda.

Open forum

- Network members were encouraged to seek out the climate officer in their principal authority
- NALC is arguing for local councils to be able to apply for more funding in their own right.

Roundup and close

- Climate change will feature on NALC's online events programme in 2024-25, network members were encouraged to look out for more information and book on to the event.
- Network members were encouraged to join the network Whatsapp group to stay connected between meetings.

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Appendix 8.2

Note of Super Councils Network Zoom session – 15 November 2024

Welcome and introduction

Mike Drew, network co-chair, opened the meeting by welcoming everyone and providing a brief overview of the agenda.

NALC/LGA corporate peer challenge programme

Luke Trevaskis, clerk of Morecombe Town Council, introduced an item on the NALC/LGA corporate peer challenge programme. Peer challenge was an objective evaluation designed to help an authority see where it was at and where it could be.

A team including representatives from NALC, the Local Government Association, Falmouth Town Council and Frome Town Council first liaised with Morecambe Town Council with regards to what to expect, how the process would run and what documentation the council needed to prepare. The team then spent two days in the town engaging with a range of stakeholders.

The review provided feedback that took into account Morecambe Town Council's circumstances. This included on staffing and a lack of resources, something the council has since addressed by taking on an additional four members of staff. Undertaking the review also helped with the council's brand and identity in the town and in its communication with residents and stakeholders.

Another benefit of the review was that it provided the opportunity for knowledge transfer and helped benchmark Morecambe Town Council against Frome Town Council and Falmouth Town Council.

The council wants to explore alternate opportunities for income streams and play a place shaping role in the town and can now put a plan together for taking that forward.

Mark Williams, clerk of Falmouth Town Council, highlighted that the other part of the peer review process was the follow up, with another visit to Morecambe Town Council due to take place next year.

The intention of the peer challenge process was to make a series of helpful recommendations that would help the council to take things forward, including on local priorities and outcomes, organisational place leadership, financial planning and management, capacity and improvement.

Mark also informed network members that Falmouth Town Council had previously undertaken a peer challenge and found it very useful. The council had grown quickly and taken on more service delivery and the peer review process was very helpful to see if the council was still fit for purpose.

Luke Trevaskis stated that Morecambe Town Council had already been aware of some of the issues set out in the report.

The review had resulted in the production of a publicly accessible document that councillors and officers couldn't hide from. This meant there was now an eagerness to not put off doing things, whether that was taking on more staff or improving corporate identity in the town in order to provide the services promised to the community.

Follow ups would take place after six months and twelve months, with reports produced after each period.

A summary of the discussion relating to this item is as follows:

- Network members were reminded that they could register their interest in undertaking a peer review by emailing Anders Hanson at anders.hanson@nalc.gov.uk
- The biggest hurdle for Morecambe Town Council was trying to figure out how to get the council into the place it wanted to be as quickly as possible. The biggest criticism was trying to resource the council's additional ambitions. When the report came out it helped to explain to people why the council needed additional members of staff.
- NALC could manage up to five peer challenges in a year.
- Morecambe Town Council is political and politics can change quite quickly. The city council has been quite reluctant to transfer assets or work with the local council. It was the job of Luke and the peer challenge team to make sure that everybody felt heard, with some semblance of all ideas on the table
- Have any reviews come to the conclusion that councils could cut staff to save money?

Office for Local Government

Ruby Dixon from the Office for Local Government (Oflog) introduced an item on the work of Oflog, which was launched at the LGA Conference in July. Although it didn't have data for local councils, Oflog still welcomed views from those in the local council sector, as the sector delivers important services.

Oflog was interested in the data local councils have and how they use that data, as well as opinions on the data and on Oflog itself.

Oflog was committed to building up the Local Authority Data Explorer tool. Tranch one had involved populating it with metrics on adult social care, adult skills and waste management. Oflog was now engaging on tranche two, which included business and economic growth, corporate and finance, planning, roads and fly-tipping.

Oflog was aware the data explorer needed more work doing to it. In particular, the build team was working on adding contextual information.

Oflog was engaging through workshops and by inviting written responses. The purpose of the workshops was to present draft metrics to the local authorities that had signed up and to give them the opportunity to provide their views and add context. When conducting the workshops, questions such as is this the best measure to use for local authorities?/do they have accountability for those services? is the metric measuring what it says it is measuring? is the data standardised in a way that it can be used for comparisons? e.g. with the nearest neighbour are asked.

The deadline for providing written feedback to Oflog is 22 November. After 22 November, Oflog will go through all feedback received and determine what changes should be made. Early in the New Year into the Summer Oflog will start engagement on tranche three.

Oflog has three strategic priorities: inform, warn and support and will be delivering a webinar on best practice in waste management before the end of the year.

A summary of the discussion relating to this item is as follows:

- Oflog's remit was to go to district council level and not lower, but Oflog could provide contextual information if local councils felt strongly enough about that.
- Local councils will be most influenced in tranche 4, as they provide, amongst other things, leisure services.
- If data is being gathered by principal councils, will it include the work of local councils?
- Oflog was currently gathering data in a number of ways e.g. through stakeholder engagement. No surveys had been undertaken yet, but Oflog would probably do surveys in the future as it got more metrics.
- There was no reason why a request couldn't be made for a meeting to highlight aspirations for where the data goes.
- Oflog needs to expand out to look at place.

Network survey

Justin Griggs provided context for the survey on the future of the network. NALC was doing this for all networks, with the aim of gauging awareness of sessions, finding out why people are or aren't attending them, making sure they cover the key issues

members want them to cover and that they meet the network's objectives. NALC was particularly keen to hear from councillors on what would help them engage with the Super Councils Network.

Open forum

- The policy officer provided an overview of NALC's [analysis of local council tax levels of precepting local authorities for 2023/24](#).
- Cllr Shar Roselman raised two concerns about Borough Councils. Firstly that they were trying to get rid of staff and ask local (parish and town) councils to take on more responsibilities e.g. liaising with schools on school swimming lessons. As the same staff were usually the ones responsible for applying for government funding, there were fears this could make it even harder for local councils to access government funding. Secondly that they were tinkering with the tax base by increasing the number of non payment households, resulting in the parish precept being spread amongst fewer households who ended up having to pay more.

Roundup and close

- Network members were asked if they wanted a forum for informal discussion such as a Facebook group.
- The policy manager informed members that setting up a Whatsapp Group was part of the survey on the future of the network.

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