

## **SMALLER COUNCILS COMMITTEE | AGENDA**

Date: 13 February 2024

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

Location: Zoom

To submit an apology for this meeting please email  
[NALCcommittees@nalc.gov.uk](mailto:NALCcommittees@nalc.gov.uk) or call 020 7637 1865.

### **DECISION ITEMS**

#### **1. Apologies and welcome (10:00-10:05)**

- 1.1. To note any apologies.

Verbally at  
the meeting

#### **2. Minutes of previous meeting (10:05-10:15)**

- 2.1. To approve the minutes of the meetings held on 10 October 2023 and 18 December 2023 and to note any matters arising and other items not covered elsewhere on the agenda.

Appendix  
2.1 and 2.2

#### **3. Member services update (10.15-10.30)**

- 3.1. To receive a presentation from the head of member services on NALC's member services team.

Verbally at  
the  
meeting.

### **DISCUSSION ITEMS**

#### **4. Financial resilience (10:30-10:50)**

- 4.1. Mark Mullbery, of Mulberry and Co and the Internal Audit Forum, to attend to give an update on upcoming changes to the Practitioners Guide related to internal audit and to hear from committee members as to how they think the changes will be received, whether they think it will help improve financial resilience and for any ideas for how to encourage smaller councils to take up the new recommendations.

Appendix  
4.1

## 5. **Co-options (11:00-11:10)**

- 5.1. The committee to identify proposals for co-options to the committee. Appendix 5.1

## 6. **Committee workplan 2024 and 2025 (11:10-11:50)**

- 6.1. To consider a report on the committee workplan to deliver the National Assembly work programme/priorities for 2024/25. Appendix 6.1

## 7. **Martyn's Law steering group (11:50-11:55)**

- 7.1. To reappoint a member of the Smaller Councils Committee to the Martyn's Law steering group. Appendix 7.1

## 8. **Rural Services Network (11:55-12:00)**

- 8.1. To appoint a member of the Smaller Councils Committee to the Rural Services Network. Appendix 8.1

## **INFORMATION ITEM**

## 9. **Local Council Award Scheme**

- 9.1. To note the update on the Local Council Award Scheme criteria review. Appendix 9.1

## 10. **Date and time of next meeting (12:00)**

- 10.1. In person on 16 April 2024 at The Bloomsbury Building, 10 Bloomsbury Way, Holborn, London, WC1A 2SL starting at 11:00am.

## **Appendix 2.1**

### **SMALLER COUNCILS COMMITTEE | DRAFT MINUTES**

Meeting of the Smaller Councils Committee held on Zoom on 10 October 2023.

#### **Attendees:**

National Assembly members – Councillors Mick Baker, Bob Blezzard, Allan Blakemore, Mike Drew (NALC vice-chair, member services), David Francis, Mark Valladares (committee vice chair), Directly elected member: Councillor Josephine Parish (committee chair). Co-opted members: Sarah Bristow and Councillors Graham Ford and Sarah Jackson (for part).

#### **Also in attendance:**

Jessica Lancod-Frost (policy officer), Jonathan Owen (chief executive).

#### **1. Apologies and welcome**

Apologies for absence were received from Cllr Marcus Allen.

#### **2. Minutes of previous meetings**

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

Comments raised in response included:

- The policy officer informed the committee that Worknest were still keen to engage with them at a future meeting. The chief executive clarified that Worknest's current focus was the national employment template
- Was there any way the Smaller Councils Committee could have more than four co-opted members over two years?
- Awareness of the committee elections amongst non-Assembly members was low
- The chief executive confirmed that NALC was already promoting the committee elections to non Assembly members through the newsletter and on social media
- That all small councils had a role to play in tackling the climate emergency and were encouraged to look at the [climate change page](#) on the NALC website and to consider joining the [climate emergency national network](#).

**Resolved (1):** That the minutes of meeting held on 18 July 2023 be approved.

**Resolved (2):** That the action log be noted.

### **3. Martyn's Law Steering Group**

The policy manager provided an overview of Martyn's Law, which will require venues to take steps to improve public safety depending on the size of venue and the activity taking place. NALC was now looking for a representative from the committee to sit on a steering group, to include officers from SLCC and NALC and representatives from other committees, that would check the requirements were not overly onerous and ensure there was enough support for smaller councils.

A discussion then took place, in which the following points were raised:

- Local (parish and town) councils ought to have a say on national legislation
- The objective of the group is to ensure that legislation and any guidance and advice flowing from it is appropriate
- For local councils it's really about risk management, not terrorism prevention
- There was a need to find a proportionate solution for community events in village halls that wasn't just exemption from any additional requirements

**Resolved (1):** That Cllr Josephine Parish and Cllr Graham Ford be appointed to the Martyn's Law Steering Group.

### **4. Rural Services Network**

The committee chair introduced this item by stating that she hoped it would be flagged up when the new committee met. In the meantime, committee members were asked if anyone was willing to put themselves forward to represent the committee on the Rural Services Network (RSN).

Cllr David Francis clarified that this was about representing NALC, not the Smaller Councils Committee, on the RSN. The RSN was partly a lobbying body in terms of rural policy matters and proofing government programmes from a rural perspective, but also about promoting good practice and solutions to rural problems.

**Resolved (1):** That the item on appointing a committee member to represent NALC on the RSN be deferred to the next meeting.

## **5. NALC Committee Elections**

The administration manager introduced this item by stating that NALC needed to do another big push to attract candidates to stand for election to the Smaller Councils Committee. Information about the elections had already gone out in the weekly chief executive's bulletin, on social media and in targeted emails to county associations, but suggestions of what more NALC could do would be welcomed.

The committee chair thanked the administration manager for her efforts so far in promoting the committee elections.

**Resolved (1):** That the update on promotion of NALC's committee elections be noted.

## **6. Financial resilience**

The committee agreed to invite Worknest to attend the next formal meeting.

A discussion then took place on NALC's Model Financial Regulations consultation, in which the following points were raised:

- The very smallest councils need something shorter than the current document, which is 19 pages
- The chief executive confirmed that while there were reasons for the templates being 19 pages, feedback on the length could be relayed directly back to Steve Parkinson
- Committee members were encouraged to respond to the consultation individually, via the forms link
- It needed to be made easier for local councils to go through the financial regulations and find the parts they must comply with

**Resolved (1):** Worknest to be invited to the next formal meeting of the Smaller Councils Committee.

**Resolved (2):** The committee to share general feedback on NALC's Model Financial Regulations with Steve Parkinson via email.

**Resolved (3):** Committee members to respond individually to NALC's Model Financial Resilience consultation via the forms link.

## **7. Civility and respect**

The civility and respect project manager provided an update on the Civility and Respect Project as follows:

- The group was still progressing with work to encourage councils to sign the civility and respect pledge
- Phase 2 of the project involved looking at chronic and serious failure
- Key work to support this included active discussions with the Jo Cox Civility Commission and a survey which had recently been extended to local councils on experiences of civility and respect issues, particularly serious and chronic failures. Committee members were encouraged to respond to the survey if they hadn't already done so
- An intervention workshop with nineteen stakeholders from national and local government had also taken place. Outcomes from the workshop included an attempt to identify a serious and chronic failure and an attempt to identify a range of interventions, of which so far there were three:
  - A potentially increased role for internal audit, including publication of the internal audit report
  - A Survey of monitoring officers, which was currently active
  - Peer to peer monitoring and mentoring which was also currently ongoing.

A discussion then took place, in which the following comments were raised:

- There needs to be a mechanism whereby individual councillors have somewhere they can take their concerns to
- The resources on training on the [civility and respect page](#) on the NALC website are accessible to all, not just clerks
- A continuum was developed very early on in the project where phase 1 would look at pre chronic failure, including development of a number of workstreams
- The group is now trying to gather research data and is about to launch another survey with the SLCC
- Until training is made mandatory, the people who need it won't turn up
- The lack of sanctions means there is no deterrent for poor behaviour
- Some monitoring officers are taking months to deal with issues
- There needs to be some kind of Ofsted for local councils

- The civility and respect project manager informed the committee that peer reviews were about to commence

**Resolved (1):** That the update from the Civility and Respect Project Manager be noted.

## **8. Review of the last two years**

The chief executive introduced this item by stating that all committees were being asked what they had learnt, what they would like to have done differently and what they would like to pass on to the new committee to consider building into their future work programmes.

Committee members were then invited to offer their feedback, which they did as follows:

- The committee had suffered from a lack of continuity, especially amongst directly elected members
- Governance structures don't make enough provision for county officers. Could the new committee think about that in terms of judicious co-option?
- A plea was made to ensure a joined up approach with other committees
- If the committee wants county officers to be involved, they need to ensure the county association is on board and consider possible compensation for the county officers time
- The biggest problem is knowing what the committee's reach is amongst smaller councils
- It still remains a problem that the committee only has three directly elected seats for over 8,000 councils

**Resolved (1):** That the feedback given by committee members on the last two years be noted.

## **9. Committee chair report**

The committee chair spoke to a report she had written. Most of the items on it had already been covered elsewhere in the meeting, however the committee hadn't received a response to Lillian Burns report analysing responses to the letter to smaller councils.

Cllr David Francis challenged the chair's assertion that NALC hadn't responded to the report. Policy Committee had addressed points that were most relevant to them over a year ago and the member services points were being listened to. For example, the engagement with Worknest was part of addressing points arising from it.

The committee thanked Cllr Josephine Parish for taking over as committee chair.

**Resolved (1):** That the committee chair's report be noted.

**Resolved (2):** That Cllr Josephine Parish be thanked for her time as committee chair.

## **10. Date and time of next meeting**

18 December at 10:00am by Zoom.



## **Appendix 2.2**

### **SMALLER COUNCILS COMMITTEE | DRAFT MINUTES**

Meeting of the Smaller Councils Committee held by Zoom teleconference at 10:00 on 18 December 2023.

#### **Attendees:**

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

#### **Also in attendance:**

Claire FitzGerald (administration manager), Jessica Lancod-Frost (policy officer), Justin Griggs (head of policy and communications).

#### **1. Apologies and welcome**

No apologies for absence were received.

#### **2. Election of committee chair**

Cllr Marcus Allen was elected committee chair for 2024 and 2025.

**Resolved:** That Cllr Marcus Allen be elected chair of the Smaller Councils Committee for 2024 and 2025.

#### **3. Election of committee vice chair**

Vanessa Lowe was elected committee vice chair for 2024 and 2025.

**Resolved:** That Vanessa Lowe be elected vice chair of the Smaller Councils Committee for 2024 and 2025.

#### **4. Committee induction**

Committee members and NALC staff were invited to introduce themselves.

#### **4.1 Member role profiles**

The committee received and were encouraged to read a paper setting out the roles and responsibilities of NALC committee members.

**Resolved:** That the paper on committee member roles and responsibilities be noted.

#### **4.2 NALC's committee processes**

The committee received and were encouraged to read a paper setting out NALC's committees process which had been agreed by National Assembly.

**Resolved:** That the paper on NALC's committee process be noted.

#### **4.3 Terms of reference, constitution and agenda and minutes from the previous meeting**

The committee received and were encouraged to read the committee's terms of reference, the NALC constitution and agenda and minutes from recent sessions of the committee. An error was identified on page 15 in sub section d) in Composition, this should refer to a) and b) not 4 i) and 4ii).

A brief discussion took place, in which the following points were raised:

- Could email addresses be made visible to members when committee papers are sent out?
- Meeting in person was very important

Committee members agreed to communicate with each other by email between meetings.

**Resolved (1):** That the terms of reference, constitution, agenda and minutes from the previous meeting be noted.

**Resolved (2):** The committee to communicate with each other by email between meetings.

## **5. 2024 calendar of meetings**

The calendar of Smaller Councils Committee meetings for 2024 was noted and the committee agreed to hold their in-person meeting on 16 April in London, at a venue to be confirmed.

**Resolved (1):** That the 2024 calendar of meetings be noted.

**Resolved (2):** That the meeting on 16 April take place in person in London, at a venue to be confirmed.

## **6. Date and time of next meeting**

13 February 2024 at 10:00am by Zoom.

## **SMALLER COUNCILS COMMITTEE | APPENDIX 4.1**

### **Financial Resilience: Changes to the Practitioners Guide 2024 related to internal audit**

The Smaller Councils Committee has previously requested financial resilience to be a recurring theme for the committee to engage with. As part of ongoing National Association of Local Councils (NALC) work around civility and respect, local council improvement and internal audit, a number of recommendations for changes to the Practitioners Guide were proposed by the Internal Audit Forum (IAF) with the aim of improving local council governance and accountability.

The Joint Panel on Accountability and Governance (JPAG) is responsible for issuing proper practices (published in the Practitioners Guide) about the governance and accounts of smaller authorities. JPAG considered the various proposed changes and those are still to be confirmed and published for the financial year 2024/25.

One amendment that we can give the committee early sight of that JPAG has accepted that will appear as an addition in the 2024 Practitioners Guide is an encouragement for councils to publish their full internal audit report on their websites with the Annual Governance and Accountability Return (AGAR) along with any comments from the external auditor.

Mark Mulberry from IAF will join the committee to share how this recommendation was developed and why it should help improve financial resilience in smaller councils. We would welcome feedback on this change, how it might impact on smaller councils and how we might encourage more councils to adopt this change.

Contact officer: [Charlotte Eisenhart](#), head of member services

## **SMALLER COUNCILS COMMITTEE | APPENDIX 5.1**

### **Advice to committees on co-options**

The following paper was originally presented to Management Board on 9 January.

NALC's constitution allows for committees to appoint up to four co-opted members (without voting rights). They do not have to appoint co-opted members.

Committees are advised to consider the following when considering appointments:

- Assembly members are not usually appointed as co-optees as they have an opportunity to get directly involved in the work of committees through the election process.
- Committees should consider appointing co-optees to fill skill needs of the committee (e.g. policy committee may want someone with a planning expertise); to build links with national networks; to strengthen the diversity of committees by appointments from under-represented groups; to access county officer, SLCC and clerk expertise.
- Committees are invited to indicate whether they wish to co-opt at their first main meeting of the new cycle.
- When committees have considered whether they want to co-opt vacancies will be advertised centrally.

## **SMALLER COUNCILS COMMITTEE | APPENDIX 6.1**

### **Smaller Councils 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 2024/2025 cycle.

5. **Recommendation**

6. That the committee comments on and agrees the activity, including the proposals in 13-29, 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 2023 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. Climate change**

- NNN: Climate emergency – continue to encourage smaller council representatives to join the network.
- Check climate change webpage has appropriate advice/guidance for smaller councils.
- Online event on climate change – invite smaller council speaker.
- Establish new Net Zero sub-group – ensure smaller councils which have adopted a Net Zero 2030 policy are invited to future Zoom roundtable sessions for this group.

**14. Health and wellbeing**

- Check health and wellbeing webpage contains appropriate advice/guidance for smaller councils.
- Online event on health and wellbeing – invite smaller council speaker to future health and wellbeing online event.

**15. Young people**

- Check young people webpage has appropriate advice/guidance for smaller councils.
- Online event on young people (December 2024) – invite smaller council speaker to future health and wellbeing online event.

**16. Planning**

- Check planning web page has appropriate advice/guidance for smaller councils.
- Identify barriers to planning for smaller councils/where support for smaller councils is required.
- Online event on neighbourhood planning (September 2024) – invite a smaller council speaker to participate.

## 17. **Make a change**

- Ensure smaller council voice and current/emerging data/lobbying positions affecting smaller councils on elections factored into any updates made to Make A Change web page.

## 18. **Community safety**

- Martyn's Law Steering Group – Smaller Councils Committee seat on this group to be continued
- New dedicated webpage – ensure smaller council perspective factored in.
- Inclusion of case studies from smaller councils in new case study publication.
- Online event on emergency planning – October 2024 – invite smaller council speaker to participate.

## 19. **Sector financial resilience**

- Feedback from Smaller Councils Committee on upcoming change to the Practitioners' Guide.
- Support for smaller councils with AGAR form moving online.

## 20. **Sector risk register**

- Ensure inclusion of risks affecting smaller councils included on sector risk register.

## 21. **NALC manifesto**

- Continue to ensure lobbying on and inclusion of policy positions (in)-directly affecting smaller councils in NALC manifesto.

## 22. **Artificial Intelligence**

- AI online event – July 2024 – potential invitation to smaller council speaker.
- Ensure smaller council angle factored into any meaningful policy, lobbying or other sector discussions on AI.



## **23. Data**

- Input to NALC's work engaging with Government, OFLOG and other bodies.

## **24. Membership survey**

- Ensure questions relevant to smaller councils are included in any co-produced NALC membership survey.

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

- Continue to lobby the government to promote community governance reviews in all currently un-parished areas and the creation of new local (including smaller) councils in these areas.

## **26. Sharing good practice**

- Local Council Award Scheme – promote to smaller councils.
- Star Council Awards – promote to smaller councils.

## **27. Local Council Award Scheme**

- Encourage smaller councils to gain accreditation.
- Ensure smaller councils contribute to upcoming criteria review.

## **28. External speakers for Committee meetings**

- JPAG.
- SAAA – moving the AGAR form online.
- Smaller council accredited under LCAS.
- Smaller council Star Council finalists in 2023.

## **29. Other**

- Input to publications review

Contact officer: Jessica Lancod-Frost, policy officer T: 020 7290 0319



## **SMALLER COUNCILS COMMITTEE | APPENDIX 8.1**

### **Rural Services Network**

1. **Purpose of report**

2. For direction.

3. **Summary**

4. This report provides information on the Rural Services Network (RSN) and invites the committee to nominate a representative to RSN for 2024/2025.

5. **Financial implications**

6. NALC is a member of RSN and attendance at meetings or events is expected to be remote only. Attendance at in person meetings or events will require discussion and authorisation with the committee lead officer.

7. **Background**

8. The National Association of Local Councils (NALC) is a member of the RSN, which is partly a lobbying body in terms of rural policy matters and proofing government programmes from a rural perspective, but also about promoting good practice and solutions to rural problems. More information on RSN can be found at <https://www.rsnonline.org.uk/>.

9. In recent years the Smaller Councils Committee has agreed one member to represent NALC on RSN and attend their monthly online seminars and the National Rural Conference, reporting back to officers and the committee. The RSN's seminar programme for 2024 can be found [here](#).

10. A reflection on the previous process to be addressed is ensuring more effective engagement with the representative and NALC staff ahead of meetings. This will ensure the representative is fully briefed and aware of any priorities and key messages ahead of each meeting or seminar. There may also be occasions where a member of NALC staff may also attend a meeting or seminar to provide support.

11. **Recommendation**

12. The committee agrees a representative to RSN for 2024/2025.

## **SMALLER COUNCILS COMMITTEE | APPENDIX 9.1**

### **Local Council Award Scheme criteria review – paper for Larger Councils Committee and Smaller Councils Committee**

The National Association of Local Councils (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 larger Councils Committee and Smaller Councils Committee to engage with this consultation and help ensure that the voices 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](mailto:localcouncilawardscheme@nalc.gov.uk).

Contact officer: [Anders Hanson](#), member services manager

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