



Executive Committee Meeting Monday 29 July 2024 held Beacon Business Centre, Hopton Park and via ZOOM 6.30pm to 8.21pm

PRESENT:

Cllr John Scragg (Chippenham TC) Chair, Cllr Andrew Sadler Smith (Cherhill PC), Cllr George McCaffery (Corsham TC), Cllr Judy Rose (Devizes Town Council), Ian Nockolds (Community First) WALC Local Councils Advisor, Cllr Roger Evans (North Bradley Parish Council), Cllr Dr Anthony Clarke (Colerne Parish Council), Cllr Andy Kinsey (Wilton Town Council) and Cllr Steve Jeffries (Warminster Town Council).

ONLINE:

Richard Culverhouse (Hilperton Parish Council), Mrs AC Purves FSLCC, Clerk & Cllr David Sangster (Idmiston Parish Council), Cllr Tony Philips (Fovant Parish Council), Cllr Ian Mitchell (Amesbury Town Council), Cllr Alison Parsons (Brinkworth Parish Council), Cllr Tim Walton (Box Parish Council), Cllr Nicholas Williams (Heytesbury, Imber and Knook Parish Council) and Cllr Nathan Keates (Melksham Without Parish Council).

1. Welcome

Cllr Scragg welcomed everyone to the meeting.

2. Apologies

Apologies had been received from Cricklade Town Council and Marlborough Town Council.

3. Minutes of the Last Meeting

Minutes of the Executive Meeting held on 29th April 2024 were adopted and signed as a true record by the Chair.

4. Local Council Advisor

The Chair introduced the Local Council Advisor, Ian Nockolds, who summarised his report to the Executive. Following the last Executive Meeting, WALC have delivered four online courses:

- Being a Successful Chair
- Councillor Essentials

- Responding to Planning Applications
- The Code of Conduct Explained

These courses have been delivered in addition to the e-learning courses, developed by the South West Association of Local Councils on their Nimble platform. A further schedule of online training provision has been developed for the Autumn, including:

- Budget Setting
- Local Council Finance Explained

In addition to the online and e-learning provision, WALC is currently speaking to ten Councils about delivering on-site face to face training for Councillors. There is a separate programme of online training offered for Clerks.

Enquiries continue to be received and between April 29th and July 23rd the Local Council Adviser has dealt with 152 queries from 98 Councils. 105 enquiries have been instigated by Clerks, 18 by Chair's and 12 by Councillors. The three biggest categories of interest are:

Training – requests for training provision have been split between Clerks and Councillors, specifically support for new Councillors.

WALC – most issues relate to subscriptions and invoicing, plus some administration around password access to the WALC website.

Procedure – discipline issues and procedure are the most common query, with additional queries concerning quorum and Councillor vacancies.

Following a presentation at the last Executive meeting, the Local Council Adviser has held further meetings with Wiltshire Council Officers regarding the Wiltshire Independent Remuneration Panel and their review of Town and Parish Allowances. The discussions have considered research design, including a NALC survey on the same subject and a review of published data, relevant to this project.

The main focus for the next three months will be on organising the 2024 WALC Conference. It was proposed that the Conference would be held on November 5th at the Corn Exchange in Devizes. A discussion was then held on priority topics for the Conference, with members reminded that the previous Executive meeting considered: Artificial Intelligence, Civility & Respect, Flooding, Neighbourhood Plans and Community Transport.

RESOLVED – The 2024 WALC Conference will be held on November 5th at the Corn Exchange, Devizes. A keynote speaker who can address the new Governments Planning agenda and what it means for Town and Parish Councils, was considered the top priority.

5. NALC Update

The Chair gave an update on NALC's July National Assembly meeting:

The Assembly noted the paper on the implications of the local government financial challenge for our sector produced following their last meeting and representatives were encouraged to discuss this within their County Associations.

The Assembly held workshop sessions to help develop their major campaign theme around community safety. Representatives were asked if they had any further reflections on how NALC should define community safety, what member councils' role should be, information on county association initiatives and examples of good practice.

NALC's finances are generally in good shape, confirmed by an unqualified external audit. Consideration is being given to a slight increase on the planned affiliation fee for 2025 to 8.43p per elector capped at £2,138 in 2025/6. This is largely due to below inflation increases in recent years, higher national pay settlements and to maintain and improve services particularly public affairs with new MPs and Government. Assembly members were invited to take soundings before any final decision in the autumn. Assembly also agreed to recommend to the AGM that NALC conduct a major review of the basis of our affiliation fees next year.

On the general election, the general view of the Assembly was that county associations and councils should take time to know their local MPs and engage with them. Councils were encouraged to write a letter of congratulations to their new MP and Cllr Scragg congratulated the Local Council Advisor for doing this.

Members discussed how the Executive Committee could better engage with the National Assembly, responding in advance to the agenda items being raised.

RESOLVED – Agendas for the National Assembly meetings will be circulated upon receipt by the Local Council Advisor and Executive Meetings scheduled in advance of National Assembly meetings in order to provide feedback on key messages to be taken by the WALC representative into the meeting.

6. Community First

Ian Nockolds provided an update on four of the projects undertaken by Community First (CF) of interest to Town and Parish Councils.

Community Grants: Across Wiltshire and Swindon, Community First helps manage the Landfill Communities Fund (LCF). The County Secretary has been working with the Community First Grants Manager to highlight WALC member Councils to this opportunity for grant funding.

Village halls and community buildings: Is an advisory and support service from Community First, dedicated to championing local village halls and community buildings. The County Secretary has been working with the Village Halls team to support enquiries where the Parish Council has a role as a trustee or significant funder.

Community Led Housing - Rural Housing Enabling: Community First has been involved with the promotion and support of community led housing for several years working with the Wiltshire Community Land Trust, Wiltshire Council, Swindon Brough Council and housing associations. Recently Community First have secured funding from DEFRA to employ an Rural Housing Enabling consultant and develop an active partnership group to help raise awareness of the lack of affordable housing for local people in rural areas and encouraging and supporting communities to help make provision for new homes. The team are currently responding to initiatives in Holt, Aldbourne and West Lavington. Current funding for this project is for a very limited period, up to the end of March 2025.

Community Transport: Community First support the Community Transport sector as a whole in Wiltshire and Swindon which consists of 22 Community Transport groups and 42 link schemes. Demand for this service is growing and the groups urgently need new volunteers to support this service.

7. Finance

- a. Balances for both WALC bank accounts were noted.
- b. Members noted that The 2022/23 Audit has been completed and the 2023/24 Audit is now underway.
- c. HR support - the Local Council Advisor reported that the Monahans trail had begun after passing security checks and that advice received to date had proved useful in supporting Councils with appropriate contract provision, including a review of NALC's model employment contract.
- d. High Interest Bank Account - Members discussed what proportion of WALC's money was appropriate to move from the standard business account into the business premium account. The Churches, Charities and Local Authorities (CCLA) Investment Management Limited was discussed as an alternative to Barclays. The CCLA is used by many local councils and has had a close relationship with NALC.

RESOLVED – Members agreed that £100,000 should be transferred from the standard business account into the business premium account. The Local Council Advisor will investigate the CCLA as a future investment option.

8. Constitution

Proposed changes to the WALC Constitution were discussed. Whilst most amendments made by the Working Group have been to the body text, the arrangements set out in Appendix A for the composition of the Executive Committee remain unresolved.

Executive members discussed the importance of structuring the Executive Committee as a decision making body that has a clear membership. Discussions were also held concerning the size of the Executive, with a proposal for streamlining the committee down to 12 to 15 members considered. There was further discussion concerning how the Executive could

represent the different geographical areas of Wiltshire and Swindon. Executive members also raised concerns about terms of office, as whilst a rolling annual membership would encourage interest in and raise the profile of the Association, it could also result in a loss of experience.

RESOLVED – The Constitution Working Group comprising Cllr John Scragg, Cllr Andrew Sadler Smith and Cllr George McCaffery, would re-convene to consider the matter of Executive Committee membership.

9. Any Other Business

Cllr Dr Anthony Clarke raised correspondence Colerne Parish Council had received from Lloyds Bank concerning the Financial Services Compensation Scheme. The letter stated that The bank believes that the PC are no longer covered by the Financial Services Compensation Scheme (FSCS).

RESOLVED – The Local Council Advisor will contact NALC to seek guidance on this matter, which will be distributed to Cllr Dr Anthony Clarke and all members of the Executive. The information will also be shared through the Associations website and monthly Newsletter.

10. Date of Next Meeting

Discussion took place about the need for an AGM before the end of October. Members raised the issue of when the next NALC National Assembly meeting will be held and whether we can meet before it to provide feedback on the agenda.

RESOLVED - the AGM will be held on Wednesday 25th September 2024. The Local Council Advisor will notify members of this date and request notification of attendance so that a suitable location can be found.

The meeting closed at 8:21pm

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Cllr John Scragg, Chair WALC