

1. As a result of COVID CALC-delivered training for Councillors is not happening in every county. Can action be taken to ensure all CALCs are capable of delivering this training remotely please?
2. Jonathan, my council has (against my advice) declined to re-join NALC because they do not have a high regard for our relatively small CALC and felt the CALC subscription is not value for money. I understand you cannot currently join one without the other. If the option to join just NALC without the CALC was available, I think the decision would almost certainly have been different. Would it not be sensible to separate the two and give councils the opportunity to join NALC and make their own decision about the CALC?
3. I would be interested in finding out your thoughts as to how the Local Government review will change the role of parish and town councils? Do you see a disappearance of Borough / District levels with more power to parish / town councils? In Essex there is murmurings of a unitary authority that will even remove the county council level....

There is great uncertainty about this. Before Simon Clarke resigned as minister it looked as though we were on a journey which as you say would enhance the role of towns and parishes whilst creating larger scale unitaries at either county-wide level or as was mooted in Essex, drawing together multiple Districts. The White Paper has been pushed back to 2021 and we don't know whether it will say the same, or similar things, but we are endeavouring to stay close to it, and make clear that there is considerable scope for local councils to do more for their communities - if they are properly supported and resourced. JF

4. We have an interesting paradox from Government. They talk about wanting to devolve more powers to us, which I view as a good thing, but then we ask for financial assistance we are told to go to our principals as they have the money. When are we expecting to hear more about the white paper from Government?

See answer above. 2021. JF

5. How do we pursued government to trust us and find a way to get messages and funding to us directly rather than through principals?

The government continue to speak of their devolution and ultra-localism agenda without being clear about matters such as this. In my view and rather simply, there are three things we can do (and which are already doing to a greater or lesser extent):

1. ***Continue to encourage local councils to be ambitious and grasp the opportunity to take on more (within reason, economics and their democratic right to decide)***
2. ***Continue our work (through training, development and more general encouragement) to ensure that local councils function competently, lawfully and ethically and are seen as "good and responsible citizens".***
3. ***Promote all that is good about local councils (of which there is much) and take any and every opportunity to communicate that directly to government.***

RS

6. Jonathan F - Does the local council sector need to recognise that delivering better more efficient and effective services means grouping together and what models would you suggest.

I don't like generalising about what local councils "need to do" because it has to be driven by local circumstances, but as a general statement, if local councils are asked to do more (and given resources accordingly) then we will need to look at suitable models, which will often mean finding greater scale. In some cases that may mean merger, in other cases it may mean clusters or shared activities. This can build on a lot of good practice currently. I believe there's some very interesting work going on in and around Buckfastleigh in Devon for example. It would be good to have sessions on this at the sector body conferences? The question of scale also goes directly to the question of creating new parishes and towns and the size that they should be created at. - JF

7. That training do monitoring officers have in support of their role. Are they only there to consider complaints after the event or do they have the power to intervene to stop bullying, if not should this be considered moving forward?

Monitoring Officers' statutory role applies when a complaint is made so in this respect their role is entirely reactive. There are many MO's, however, who recognise that early intervention and informal resolution are preferable outcomes and, through our informal relationships across England and Wales and our more formal relationships with Lawyers in Local Government and the Association of Democratic Service Officers, we encourage them in this regard. We recognise, regrettably, that they have limited resources and a seemingly ever-increasing workload but will always seek to help and support them where possible.
RS

8. Is it time to develop our own in-house mediation service to assist with bullying?

Where appropriate, we do this on an informal basis at the moment – and, where possible, we do so in partnership with the County Association. There's no doubt that this is more viable and a far stronger proposition when offered as a joint service between SLCC and the CALC and we'll continue to work with partners wherever the opportunity is available to us.
RS

9. For Jonathan Owen - In a sector where we have strict governance and democracy protocols, how is it that CALCs can operate in any manner they chose and thus all operate so differently? This can have a detrimental effect on the variety of members within their Counties. Training is one issue, ours have been slow to react to virtual training and this is affecting our Councillors. Our CALC are also dangerously close to being the 'puppet' for the County Council and therefore not keen to take on difficult emerging agendas in the County on behalf of their members.

10. Could a similar scheme to the CPD points accrued by clerks not be created for councillors with a yearly minimum level? they could then pick what training they feel appropriate to them

I think this idea has merit. It could, perhaps, be incorporated into the Local Council Award Scheme. RS

11. Training is the tip of the iceberg - is an individual is going to behave in a certain way i.e. bullying, they will do so until they are stopped. This happened in all other industries, why not in this one? We are a government organisation without protection, relying on the good will and chance that the Councillors in office are decent human beings.

SLCC's position is that temporary suspension and, in the most egregious of cases, permanent disqualification should be available as sanctions for breaches of the Code of Conduct. RS

12. With the move to devolve more powers to lower tiers of local government. How do you see smaller towns and parishes fulfilling these functions especially when finances and resources are stretched or scarce in so many areas?

This is a good question for the sector and the answer may vary from place to place. See Q6.

13. In Somerset we are going through the question of Unitary status from the County Council and part of the SLCC/SALC response is to bring Parish & Towns together into Local Networks, do you think this could work?

There is evidence to suggest there is great value in this sort of collaboration, and it is not necessarily limited to when reorganisation is looming. As JF has said, the autonomy of local councils is important and so this must be a choice – council by council – and what works in one area may not work in another. But, as a broad principle, there appear to be great benefits and some strength to be gained from this sort of collaboration and networking. RS

14. NALC may not be responsible for Clerks, but they are responsible for Councillors and Councils. Surely this means they need to really start taking this seriously and driving forward change.

As a non-NALC person I suspect that NALC would be delighted to have power over councils and councillors. I know from conversations I have had at senior levels in MHCLG that there is a profound belief in the ballot box as providing the sanction for errant councillors. As we all know, this is not effective and we need to keep saying this if we want formal legislative support to sanctions. JF

15. Why don't you survey clerks as to how many have been off sick or left their roles due to bullying?

The SLCC Board have approved plans for a follow-up survey of members on the subject of standards and behaviour. We expect to publish this before the end of the year.

16. Is there a place for party politics at local council level?

My experience of speaking to members is that sometimes party influence can be helpful but, anecdotally, the majority seem to feel that non-partisanship serves local communities better. RS

17. Voting at 16. In Wales we are about to see voting at 16 for Welsh Government. What do the panel think of this for local councils too (and a step on - standing for council at 16)?
SLCC's position would be that this is a political decision rather than one for the profession. This was our response when we were asked the question during the Welsh Government's consultation/scrutiny process. RS
18. Jonathan - we are questioning the need for diversity but have found a limited support to encourage non "middle aged white men/women"
19. How will devolution affect parish and town councils?
This is an important question. See Q6 and Q12. JF
20. I agree with Jonathan that most councillors are very good and care a lot. What support can be given to them the skills to be able to stand up to their colleagues in the minority for the good of the community?
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Responses from Jonathan Owen & Sue Baxter, NALC:

A number of issues were raised in the question and answers section of Sue Baxter's and Jonathan Owen's presentations to the Society of Local Council Clerks (SLCC) virtual training conference. The National Association of Local Councils (NALC) offers the following general comments in response to those.

Devolution and local government reorganisation

These two developments provide a real opportunity for the local (parish and town) council sector to gain in influence and reputation.

Many local councils are already assuming some discretionary roles previously performed by principal councils and this looks likely to continue. The government had indicated its intention to publish a devolution and recovery white paper in the Autumn and there is strong evidence to suggest that the role of communities including local councils will increase.

It is therefore important that the sector builds capacity and capability through enhanced training and development, robust processes and good governance and demonstrating its democratic legitimacy through contested elections and a more diverse workforce and council base.

Three county areas have been invited to submit proposals for local government reorganisation and there will be an opportunity to press for an enhanced role for local councils in that context.

Where new unitary councils have been established there is a tendency to see more local councils created too. The County Council's Network has published proposals for unitary county government with an enhanced role for local councils, other reports including by the District Councils Network also comment on the role of local councils.

You can read more about some of NALC's work on devolution [here](#) and our approach to devolution in our recent submissions to the comprehensive spending review [here](#).

NALC is also facilitating networking and information exchanges between county associations through its weekly calls with county officers and other meetings.

County Associations

NALC works very closely with the 43 county associations of local councils across England providing them with resources and support to help councils, councillors and clerks.

Like the sector itself, county associations vary and are rightly proud of their sovereignty and independence. NALC is increasingly encouraging them to work together at a regional level and to consider sharing resources which should help address some of the issues raised in the question and answer session.

It is important that SLCC members recognise the importance of having strong support for the national and county associations and to encourage their councils to become active members. NALC's view is that the sector is best supported by strong national and county bodies working together with a strong SLCC, which is why it recommends membership of both bodies.

Standards

NALC's position on standards was set out in its [evidence](#) to the Committee on Standards in Public Life (COSIPL) and we continue to call on the government to implement the recommendations made in its report as soon as possible.

Central to this is the introduction of sanctions and NALC supported this strongly in its input to the Local Government Association's (LGA) work on the development of a new national code of conduct, read more [here](#).

It is important to recognise there is much in the COSIPL report which goes beyond the sanctions issue such as recommendations and best practice suggestions which it would be sensible for the sector to take forward. This includes supporting networks for clerks and better training. NALC was disappointed that the report did not recommend mandatory training for councillors but we will continue to stress the importance of training for councillors and provide support to county associations and councils to add value to their existing training through a suite of good councillor guides and other resources including an online training course which is currently being piloted.

We have taken a number of other steps to encourage better standards such as: through our election work to encourage more people to become councillors and enhance diversity in the sector through the Diversity Commission; work with SLCC on a good governance checklist, the re-issue and updating of our grievance policy for local councils, commissioning additional HR support from HRSP, working with the LGA on a new code of conduct; updating and reissuing the good councillors guide stressing councillors' important role as employers and their responsibility to behave appropriately.

Terms and conditions

NALC has not been a member of the National Joint Council (NJC) employers' side for many years. Local councils which employ staff on Green Book terms can purchase it themselves directly from the LGA. It is important to note this is a copyright document with restrictions on sharing more widely. We continue to update the annual salary scales in line with the recommendations of the NJC with a slight variation to scales as agreed with SLCC. A few job evaluation panels are held with SLCC every year for clerks. This is an area that will need joint review over the coming year including looking at template job description, up-to-date contracts and benchmarked hours of work and pay for new clerks. This would be for new clerks. Existing contracts remain unchanged unless there is agreement between the employer and employee.