THE NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF LOCAL COUNCILS
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10 April 2015

To: National Council Representatives
To: County Associations
To: Direct Access Councils
To: All Committee Members
To: Staff at 109

Dear Colleague

NALC's direction of travel

We had an excellent National Council meeting last week at Westminster Central Hall with presentations from senior DCLG officials on the new transparency arrangements and community rights providing the opportunity for councillors to get their views across on these important issues. The Leader of the LGA's Independent Group, Marianne Overton, also spoke calling for the future settlement on devolution in England to involve all tiers of local government with parish councils at its heart. The Mayor of Rushden, Cllr Richard Lewis contributed his thoughts on working between the tiers based on experience in Northamptonshire. National Council also agreed a new policy position on devolution to influence national political thinking, calling for parishes to be created across the UK (http://www.nalc.gov.uk/library/news-stories/1544-discussion-paper-on-devolution-2/file).

As Chairman and Chief Executive, we were struck at how improved this session was - with key national organisations engaging with NALC and more opportunities for Councillors to get involved and shape debate and topical policy. We thought this demonstrated the progress we have made, with your help; and thought it would be a good time at the start of the new financial year to share with you our thoughts on that progress and our developing plans for this year and the future

General

Last year's AGM in October agreed a three year improvement plan for NALC focussing on value for money services, increasing membership and giving the sector a strong national

voice. We are making good progress on all of its key actions, though there is still much to achieve: with your help over the next two years.

There has been a tighter focus on internal performance and financial management with a "dashboard" reported to national council of key performance indicators including time taken to respond to legal inquiries and letters and the number of press releases issue each month. We are pleased that over 95% of legal inquiries have been dealt with in the timescale set by CALCs or Councils and we are averaging over 6 national press releases a month (http://www.nalc.gov.uk/library/news-stories/1542-chairman-and-chief-executive-report/file).

Other developments include:

- Greater involvement by CALCs and Councils in our lobbying work with many colleagues joining us in a series of roundtables with officials and meetings with Ministers – making sure your voice is heard at the heart of Government.
- Closer and complementary working with CALCs and the Society of Local Council Clerks.
- Addressing some long standing issues including relations with the County Officers Forum, NALC's Constitution and persuading several large councils back into membership.
- A greater focus on NALC's customers with User Groups set up, NALC staff getting out and about more and our own attendance at over 30 AGMs. We are learning from that feedback and shaping NALC's policies and services accordingly.

Our plans for this year (all of which are dependent upon your views and support) include addressing the constitutional question, putting in place a three year budget plan and modernising our affiliation fee structure.

NALC's Committees

We are working to make our committees more effective with greater scope for involvement and engagement.

- National Council and AGM have been refreshed and Councillors given more of a say through roundtable policy development sessions: on employment; communications and NALC's Manifesto for example.
- Standing Committees have agreed work programmes for this year and we have trialled electronic voting in Larger Councils' Committee. Increasingly we will be using telephone and internet-conferencing to encourage participation from across the country.

- We have begun to use task and finish groups to encourage a wider involvement in our deliberations.
- We have agreed role profiles for National Council members and hope to attract greater interest in getting involved at a national level in the future (http://www.nalc.gov.uk/library/news-stories/1547-national-council-member-role-profile/file).
- Begun work on improving our offer to the largest councils.

Our plans for this year are to propose significant changes to our Committee structure with a reduction in the number of meetings and a stronger Executive Management Board. To use more councillors in task and finish groups to address issues quickly; ranging from rural matters to devolution. And to have an AGM outside London, with an overnight element to encourage networking.

Lobbying successes

National Council and Policy Committee shaped a streamlined manifesto (http://www.nalc.gov.uk/our-work/the-manifesto-campaign) focussing on three issues: stronger local democracy, fairer funding and more powers. We have seen some notable achievements over the last year including:

- Referenda principles not applied - despite clear expression by Ministers to do so
- Council tax support funding, continuing to slow down principal councils not passing on funding providing breathing space for our sector to fill the gap
- Electoral commission backed our stance on e-mailing electoral nomination forms
- DCLG consulting on extending ombudsman to larger councils
- Secured a multi-million DCLG support for smaller councils to respond to transparency arrangements
- First sector meeting with DCLG officials working on parish agenda to improve understanding and ensure legislation is sensible.
- Given evidence on rural broadband and neighbourhood planning to two House of Commons Committees, representing your concerns within Parliament.

Our plans include a lobby day on 30 June 2015 to get our message across to the new Parliament; extending our influence to other Government departments and making sure parishes are given due consideration in the devolution debate and in the new Government's work programme.

Communications

We are providing quicker feedback about what we do including CEO e-mail bulletins issued within three days of important meetings of NALC or with Ministers and other national bodies. We have also:

- Set up a new website
- Introduced a weekly e-newsletter of key sector developments (http://nalc.cmail1.com/t/ViewEmail/j/5455455666A48256/334128DEB1886E9B948D468F162BC46E)
- Consulted you on a new events programme with a planned return to overnight annual conference
- Had excellent coverage in the national, regional and local media in all its forms – written and on-line. This includes pieces in the Times and Sunday Times, Independent, Guardian, Municipal Journal, Local Government Chronical, LGA First and other trade journals and house magazines; appearances on BBC Radio and TV; and an impressive array of tweets and blogs.

We will continue to improve the quality of our dialogue with you, further develop our website and target national publications to secure positive coverage of the sector challenging the "Vicar of Dibley" stereotype.

Better services

We are ever conscious of the need to provide value for money services for the 5.6p per elector affiliation fee paid by councils for NALC's work. As well as continuing to provide legal, policy and communications advice, recent developments include:

- Local Councils Review available on-line to all councils
- DIS available on-line to all councils with the current edition identifying 22 national funding streams for you to consider accessing (http://www.nalc.gov.uk/library/news-stories/1546-dis-856/file).
  A council of a week feature on the home page of the website celebrating the very best in our sector – 20 councils have taken part so far
- An employment work stream to renegotiate the template/ model contract and provide better advice to councillors on their role as employers
- Democratic oversight of the relationship with SLCC through a new protocol and regular joint meetings
- Local council awards scheme launched

- Election hub established for CALCs to share info about how to encourage standing for election
- Regular meetings with the LGA and discussions around enabling the largest councils to access associate membership of the LGA through NALC

Plans for this year include delivering the transparency fund, establishing a sector led body to procure audit services, relaunching CiLCA, and hosting a new star councils award ceremony at the AGM.

Conclusion

NALC's progress reflects the achievements of Councils and CALCs as we work together to improve and promote the sector and deliver quality services to residents. We have a great opportunity at the moment to press the sector's case with the new Government, principal councils, the media and political parties and we would urge you to work with us to shout the message that parishes and town councils are improving their communities, delivering services and have a key role to play in a healthy democracy.

Finally we are beginning to think of the issues we should be addressing next year - 2016/17 - to include in our strategic plan to be discussed at our AGM this October. If there are any issues you would like to see addressed please let us know.

Yours sincerely,

Ken Browse
Chairman

Jonathan Owen
Chief Executive