

ISLE OF WIGHT ASSOCIATION OF LOCAL COUNCILS

REPORT OF THE NALC NATIONAL ASSEMBLY MEETING HELD AT THE CCLA OFFICES, ONE ANGEL LANE, LONDON ON 7th OCTOBER 2025

1. WELCOME

We were welcomed to the meeting by the Vice-Chair, David Francis. The meeting was shocked to be informed that the Chair, Keith Stevens is terminally ill with a malignant brain tumour. Members sent their best wishes to Keith and his family at this sad time.

2. AFFILIATION FEES 2026-27

The meeting was asked to recommend to the AGM an increase in affiliation fees from 8.34p to 8.6p per elector with an increase in the cap for the largest councils from £2,139 to 2,216. This was said to be an increase of 3.1% based on the CPI at 30th June. The recommendation was approved with three dissenters (myself included).

3. MOTIONS TO THE AGM

Three motions had been received from CALCs. The first from Northamptonshire wanted to change the criteria for entry to the Super Councils' Network from budgets of over £1m to one based solely on electorate size. The Northamptonshire representative had not been properly briefed and could not answer what electorate size his CALC had in mind. It was agreed that this was not really a matter for the AGM and would be considered further by the Management Board in consultation with the Super Councils' Network. A motion from Essex was seeking to allow CALCs to make a 5% charge for collection of NALC affiliation fees. By my calculation this would amount next year to a total of £69,400. This was not popular at the meeting as the cost would have to be recouped in the form of higher affiliation fees. It will not go forward to the AGM and will be looked at as part of a wider study of affiliation fees currently being undertaken by a Task and Finish Group. The final motion, from Lancashire is titled "Delivering Net Zero Faster, Smarter and Cheaper." The motion seeks urgent action to ensure local knowledge is integrated through effective engagement with local councils in the early stages of Net Zero energy development. The motion was put forward as a consequence of offshore wind projects off the Lancashire coast. It was decided to ask Lancashire to agree appropriate amendments to the motion to give it national relevance and application. The revised wording will be available for consideration at our meeting on 30th October.

4. WEBSITE AND AI PROJECT UPDATE

Lisa Stockdale, the staff member responsible for the NALC website and AI developments provided a review of developments. There are now 8,759 individual accounts on the revamped website. 52% are clerks, 38% councillors and 10% are other council staff. 63% of councils have at least one account sign up and the goal is to reach at least 9,000 council sign ups by one year after launch. Concerns were raised about the danger of unauthorised access and abuse of the facility particularly where there are clerks working for both member and non-member councils. It was confirmed that any reports of abuse of the system will be followed up. Concerns were also expressed regarding the dangers posed by the increasing use of AI by NALC.

5. EXTERNAL SPEAKER, PUBLIC AFFAIRS

Louis McMahon from Connect Public Affairs gave a presentation on the work they do for NALC. It is an independent public affairs and communications agency rated in the top 10 PR companies in the country. They are retained advisors to NALC, the LGA and ADSO. Since the election they have met with six government ministers and recruited 28 MPs and peers to NALC's "Westminster Forum." They started working for NALC in August 2024. Now that the English Devolution and Community Empowerment Bill is going through Parliament meetings have been held with Miatta Fahnbulleh, the new Minister for Devolution and also shadow ministers, Vikki Slade and Kevin Hollinrake. Connect prepared and briefed Justin Griggs to give evidence at the Committee Stage of the Bill and four amendments have been put down by Vikki Slade including requiring the Secretary of State to consult our sector prior to the establishment of new unitary authorities. The next steps include further consolidating NALC's position at Westminster with further Government engagement, increasing the Westminster Forum and engaging with the English Devolution Bill. The retention of Connect Public Affairs is part of a trend by NALC to outsource work in preference to using in-house staff. We were not given any figures as to the cost.

6. FEEDBACK FROM COMMITTEES

As is usual towards the end of meetings we received brief reports from committee chairs of committees and the two vice-chairs of the Association. I took the opportunity to question David Francis, the Vice-Chair (Member Services). I am concerned that work to update the national salaries agreement and job evaluation scheme for clerks which should have been completed by April this year is still ongoing with apparently no end in sight. I was advised that the next meeting of the Improvement and Development Board which has been dealing with this matter is scheduled to take place next month but am still no wiser as to when the results will come back to the National Assembly for approval. My second point concerned the Civility and Respect pledge. I asked how many councils had signed up to it and whether it represented value for money. The Chief Executive advised that the latest number is 1,865, (about 20% of councils). I did not receive a response to the latter point.

7. FUTURE MEETINGS

The next meeting of the Assembly will be held on 9th December 2025 (online).
The 2025 AGM will be held THURSDAY 13th November 2025 (online) and not as previously advised. IWALC is entitled to three voting delegates to the AGM.

Bob BLEZZARD

OCTOBER 2025

