



ISLE OF WIGHT ASSOCIATION OF LOCAL COUNCILS

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DRAFT minutes IWALC Executive Meeting 29th January 2026 at The Riverside Centre, Newport Isle of Wight and via Zoom - commenced 7pm

Present:

Cllr Steve Cooper (Chair), Cllr Patricia Redpath (Vice Chair) and Brian Jennings (County Officer)

Members:

Cllr Bob Blezzard (Newchurch), Cllr Jess Higgins (Ryde), Cllr Jonathan Hill (Shalfleet), Cllr Jane Timbrell (Shalfleet), Cllr Nick Stuart (Calbourne), Cllr Ed Hopper (Fishbourne), Cllr Vix Lowthion (Newport), Cllr Vivian Roberts (Arreton), Cllr Ian Boyd (Sandown), Cllr Jon Ellis (Brading), Cllr Tony Barry (Havenstreet & Ashe), Cllr Penny Acton (Gurnard), Cllr Bill Freshwater (Yarmouth), Cllr Diana Conyers (Ryde), Cllr Sarah Morris (Lake), Cllr Claire Critchison (Niton & Whitwell), Cllr Steve Dyer (St Helens) and Cllr David Barry (Nettlestone & Seaview)

1. Welcome

Cllr Cooper extended a warm welcome for the new year to the executive.

2. Apologies

Apologies were received from: Cllr Susan Hardy, Cllr Steph Toogood, Cllr Michael Smith, Mrs Jacky Matthews and Cllr Paul Fuller.

3. Minutes

Cllr Blezzard proposed that the minutes of the meeting held on the 30th October 2025 be accepted as an accurate record of the proceedings; this was seconded and supported by a show of hands.

4. Treasurer's Report

The Treasurer (Cllr Sue Hardy) had submitted a regular finance report and a proposed budget for 2026/27 prior to the meeting. The Chair expressed his thanks to the Treasurer for yet another year of invaluable service, and this was seconded by the members. The County Officer (CO) explained that the Treasurer had worked diligently to balance the

budget and slightly decrease the IWALC element of councils' fees this year, but the increases in fees from NALC would lead to members having to pay slightly more than the previous year. It was proposed and then seconded to approve the budget for 2026/27, and this was carried by a show of hands.

5. Chair's Report

The Chair opened his remarks by thanking the CO for the job they had done since taking on the role in September. He explained that the initial six-month contract for the CO role would expire in February and the recommendation to the members was to extend the contract on an ongoing basis with no end date. This recommendation was carried with a show of hands.

The Chair then invited the CO and Cllr Blezzard to explain that they would be representing IWALC at the NALC National Assembly annual meeting at the House of Lords. They will both be there to witness the START Council awards.

The Chair reported on two key developments from Ventnor Town Council. First, Ventnor Fringe has invited them to a meeting about closer partnership working, which is of great interest as it could stimulate the local economy and increase footfall, addressing some geographic challenges. Second, he highlighted the unique and proud tradition of the town's annual carnival, a major event that significantly boosts the local economy. Work is being done to formalise a partnership agreement between the Town Council and the Carnival Committee to clarify mutual expectations and support. Additionally, there has been positive collective buy-in from the wider town community and three outlining villages, indicating grassroots engagement. While challenges remain, the Chair believes they are on a promising path.

IWALC has two pairs of tickets to the Royal Garden Party being held in May, and councils had been nominating members (Councillors or staff were eligible) for a draw. The CO placed all of the names into a box and the Vice Chair drew two of them out. The two winning nominees are Cllr Sarah Talbot (Fishbourne PC) and Cllr Steve Cooper (Ventnor TC). The CO will provide their details to NALC, and they will in turn be sent invitations. The Chair also reported that a poverty report had been published the week before and showed that Ventnor and Ryde had some wards that were amongst the poorest in the country. The Chair will forward the report to the CO, who will share it with the members.

6. County Officer's Report

The CO reported that following a recent poll of IWALC members regarding the potential reintroduction of a newsletter, the results indicate it is not a current priority. With a 15% response rate, only a minority of respondents definitively supported the idea, while a majority felt existing email updates were sufficient or required more financial detail before committing. Consequently, it is recommended to maintain the current email communications and to review the possibility of a newsletter periodically in the future. Thanks are extended to all members who participated in the consultation.

7. Information, Advice and Guidance Service

Cllr Diana Conyers thanked everyone for responding to the poll, which asked if members

supported the bid to take over the service, backed by Ryde and Ventnor Town Councils. Cllr Conyers wished to apologise to any members from the West Wight who had responded on the understanding that the West Wight Sports and Community Centre would be part of the bid—they withdrew before the submission deadline. The majority of member councils had responded, and of those, over 80% were supportive of the bid, and it was submitted on time. It was expected that the decision for who would supply the service would come on the 13th February, but it is now believed it could come as soon as the 3rd February.

8. Parish Futures - Cultural Investment Research

Cllr Ian Boyd explained that Parish Futures is starting a project with the help of the Arts Council to explore the role of 'cultural investment' at the level of town and parish councils. This essentially means looking at the scope and impact of local funding for the commissioning of public art, public performance, architectural design (including play spaces, public realm, public buildings), and related site-specific and thematic budgeting. There is huge scope to develop these kinds of interventions into programmes of steady civic improvement, adding value to, and often facilitating, the daily work of place-maintenance. Whilst we still have 'Priority Place' status with Arts Council England, this seems a good thing to pursue. The Arts Council designated the Isle of Wight a 'Priority Place' for support in 2021, meaning it is recognised as an area with high potential but historically low investment, prompting targeted, long-term funding and development support. This status aims to boost local culture, create jobs, and increase creative opportunities for residents, supporting a "levelling up" approach to the arts. The type of cultural investment they are interested in doesn't just have to be large-scale art projects; it could be bespoke benches that identify a sense of the locality. Sandown and Ryde Town Councils (and Newport & Carisbrooke Community Council) are bidding to become UK Towns of Culture 2028, and this sits well with that ambition. A questionnaire will be produced soon which will explore member councils' appetite for undertaking Cultural Investment.

The Chair explained that recently Ventnor had backed the launch of two new trails that take in its locality: The Armada Trail and The Dickens Trail, which would seem to reflect the spirit of Cultural Investment.

9. Protocol 16

Cllr Diana Conyers expressed her frustration that the revised Protocol 16 (written by IWALC) has not yet been adopted into the IOW Council constitution. It was proposed (and the motion carried) that the County Officer would write a strongly worded letter to the IOW Council expressing IWALC's disappointment that whilst local councils are constantly being asked to take on the burden of services that the IOWC has traditionally managed, there has been no progress with adopting this protocol.

10. Reports from Outside Bodies

The Chair started by explaining he had left his role on NALC's Civility & Respect Group as it was not delivering anything tangible for the Isle of Wight.

●**Bus & Rail User Group (Cllr Vix Lowthian):** Reported that Southern Vectis anticipates no major service changes this summer but is undergoing significant fleet electrification. Out of 48 buses, 31 will be electric by the end of March. The first 22 electric buses are arriving from Northern Ireland in February, focusing initially on routes 1, 4, 5, 8, 9, and potentially route 27 (requiring verification). New buses feature two wheelchair bays and audio-visual announcements. Regarding rail, heating issues on trains and three line closures (Feb & Nov) for essential work were discussed. The meeting also covered community buses, using Havenstreet (details from Cllr Tony Barry) as an example of advocating for funding, which appears to prioritise new services over bolstering existing ones—a need for rural communities. Operators encouraged councils to submit proposals.

●**National Assembly & LGA Workshop (Cllr Ian Boyd):** Reported that the latest National Assembly meeting was informative, particularly on Local Government Reorganisation. He also attended an LGA workshop with the IOW Health & Wellbeing Board. All H&W Boards are being instructed to report on service delivery at a neighbourhood level (equivalent to a parish in some cases), which should reveal valuable data.

●**National Landscapes (Cllr Nick Stuart):** Reported on a well-run steering group. Key focuses are projects, communications (via an improved website), and distributing government grants. Funding is available from April. He praised the group's concise, clear 23-page climate change policy, linking it to recent flooding discussions at IOW Council. He encouraged councils within the designated area to collaborate on shared interests.

●**Local Access Forum (Cllr Penny Acton):** Reported that Stewart Chandler (IOW Council) wishes to engage more with town/parish councils. Communities are encouraged to join Speedwatch initiatives (Freshwater has a good setup). A process for reporting fly-tipping on rights of way via Island Roads' 'Fix My Street' website was shared. The forum will write to the police regarding illegal, privately-owned e-scooters being used in Parkhurst Forest. Cllr Acton also reported on the Beaver Steering Group (report on website), this was briefly discussed, with the suggestion arising that Newchurch Parish Council could host a feasibility meeting where interested stakeholders could express views on the project. Cllr Acton also requested feedback from any members attending NALC events or training.

The members were thanked for their submissions, and there were no further comments.

11. Close of Meeting

With there being no further business, the meeting was declared closed at 8.05pm.