

Minutes of the 76th Annual Conference & AGM of the Northamptonshire County Association of Local Councils

Held at Moulton Community Centre, Moulton
Saturday 7 October 2023

Item																											
<p>1. Welcome & housekeeping.</p> <p>Northants CALC Deputy CEO, Lesley Sambrook Smith opened the meeting and welcomed delegates. There were 130 attendees in total, with 117 registered councillors and clerks representing over eighty member councils. The meeting was chaired by Mike Scott (MS), Chair of Northants CALC, who welcomed everyone to the meeting, including delegates, VIP guests, and sponsors.</p>																											
<p>2. Appointment of President for 2023/24.</p> <p>RESOLVED: That Jeffrey Greenwell be appointed as President for 2023/24. In accepting the appointment Jeffrey thanked everyone and apologised for his slightly curtailed attendance at the 75th AGM and that he looked forward to a quiet year as President!</p>																											
<p>3. Appointment of Auditor for the year ending 31 March 2024.</p> <p>RESOLVED: That Kate Brown Accountant be appointed as the auditor for the year ending 31 March 2024.</p>																											
<p>4. Appointment of Directors for 2023/24.</p> <p>The Appointments Panel recommended the following for appointment at the AGM:</p> <table border="1"><thead><tr><th>No.</th><th>Name</th><th>Qualifying Council</th></tr></thead><tbody><tr><td>1.</td><td>Peter Allen</td><td>Towcester Town Council</td></tr><tr><td>2.</td><td>David Fuller</td><td>Oundle Town Council</td></tr><tr><td>3.</td><td>Kate Houlihan</td><td>Far Cotton & Delapre Community Council</td></tr><tr><td>4.</td><td>Lynn Lavender</td><td>Ashton Parish Council</td></tr><tr><td>5.</td><td>Richard Lewis</td><td>Rushden Town Council</td></tr><tr><td>6.</td><td>Geoff Paul</td><td>Moulton Parish Council</td></tr><tr><td>7.</td><td>Mike Scott</td><td>Great Addington Parish Council</td></tr><tr><td>8.</td><td>Lynne Taylor</td><td>Daventry Town Council</td></tr></tbody></table> <p>RESOLVED: That the eight candidates be appointed en bloc as directors for the year 2023/24. MS thanked retiring director, Ally Chang, for her service to the Association and welcomed the one new director, Kate Houlihan to the board.</p>	No.	Name	Qualifying Council	1.	Peter Allen	Towcester Town Council	2.	David Fuller	Oundle Town Council	3.	Kate Houlihan	Far Cotton & Delapre Community Council	4.	Lynn Lavender	Ashton Parish Council	5.	Richard Lewis	Rushden Town Council	6.	Geoff Paul	Moulton Parish Council	7.	Mike Scott	Great Addington Parish Council	8.	Lynne Taylor	Daventry Town Council
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<p>5. To approve the minutes of the 75th AGM held on 1 October 2022</p> <p>The minutes were approved as a true and correct record of the meeting and were signed by the chair.</p>																											

6. To receive the Annual Report for the year ending 31 March 2023

MS commended the Annual Report and Accounts to the AGM, highlighting the support the Association gave member councils following the death of Queen Elisabeth II, the distribution of over £100,000 of CRF monies to parish and town councils in Northamptonshire, the engagement with the unitary councils on the development of the Local Area Partnerships, and the lobbying work the Association does nationally, particularly this year on improving clerks' terms and conditions.

RESOLVED: That the Annual Report & Accounts be received and noted.

7. To determine subscription levels for the year ending 31 March 2025.

The board of directors recommends that the per council element of the Northants CALC membership fee for the year starting 1 April 2024 and ending 31 March 2025 be increased by inflation (CPIH July 2023 – 6.4%) from £181.43 to £193.05. The board of directors recommends that the per elector element of the Northants CALC membership fee for the year starting 1 April 2024 and ending 31 March 2025 be increased by inflation (CPIH July 2022 – 6.4%) from 27.23 pence to 28.97 pence.

Larger councils (10,000 – 30,000 electorate) are charged a fixed fee for membership of Northants CALC. The board of directors recommends to the AGM that the fixed fee per council for the year starting 1 April 2024 and ending 31 March 2025 be increased by inflation (CPIH July 2023 – 6.4%) from £2,902.93 to £3,088.72 per council. The total fee payable will therefore be (£3,088.72 + NALC Affiliation fee capped at £2,037*). The equivalent fee for super councils (30,000 + electors) is increased from £5,273.44 to £5,610.94. The total fee payable will therefore be (£5,610.94 + NALC Affiliation fee capped at £2,037*).

Parish Meetings with less than 100 electors AND no precept are offered affiliate membership for 2024/25 free of charge. The maximum fee that any council or parish meeting pays is capped at £1 per elector.

RESOLVED: That the board's recommendations be approved.

8. Artificial Intelligence and Parish and Town Councils

Northants CALC CEO, Danny Moody, gave a presentation on AI and Parish & Town Councils starting with an overview of AI and then exploring the impact of AI – both positive and negative – in the parish and town council sector. Danny gave several examples of how AI could be used for things such as community engagement, reporting defects on the rights of way network, and helping to make comments on planning applications. A short Q&A followed the presentation, where the dichotomy of the pros and cons of AI was explored.

9. Engagement with the Unitary Councils

Guest speakers George Candler, Interim Chief Executive at North Northamptonshire Council, and Sally Burns, Director of Public Health at West Northamptonshire Council addressed the conference.

George Candler walked delegates through NNC's strategic plan and the vision that drives what the council does. He said that a permanent CEO is being recruited and an appointment is expected by the end of November, with an announcement on 7 December 2023 at NNC's full council meeting. George said that the financial outlook and the operational environment for all councils is challenging and that NNC has an £8million predicted shortfall for 2023/24, with adults' and children's services being the most challenging and representing approx. 57% of overall expenditure. George said that he had been passionately involved with parish and town councils and had helped create Shrewsbury Town Council in Shropshire and Northampton Town Council. He said, "*I and NNC recognise the importance of parish and town councils and it is important that the relationship is maintained and developed.*" He recognised the frustration of slow communications and things not happening as quickly as they should but said "*The crucial thing is that we keep talking, we keep evolving, that we keep learning, and that we treat each other as equal partners*" and added "*Your voice in what we do is really important*". George went through the various ways that NNC engages with and makes information available to parish and town councils and announced that NNC will be confirming in the next two weeks the appointment of a Parish Liaison Officer to act as a single point of contact between NNC and all parish and town councils in North Northamptonshire. George welcomed the involvement of parish and town councils in the development of the "Big50" vision for how North Northamptonshire will be in 2050. The first Big50 conference was held in July 2023 and further events are planned for 2024.

Sally Burns opened by saying that she was standing in for WNC's Chief Executive, Anna Earnshaw, who

sends her best wishes to the conference and apologies that she couldn't attend in person due to another long-standing commitment. Sally said that she was pleased to be at the conference because as Director of Public Health and a parish councillor herself, she knows the vital role that parish and town councils play in health and wellbeing in their communities. Sally outlined the transformation journey that WNC has been on since its creation on 1 April 2021 and agreed with George Candler that councils are operating under significant financial and service pressures. Sally said that good and positive progress was being made, albeit that there is always more to do. She introduced Alan Burns, the Parish Liaison Officer for WNC, and set out how his role was created and developed following the recommendations in Northants CALC's Building Communities prospectus. Alan has been very active working with parishes, setting up forums, and helping to unstick communication blockages in the system. Sally said *"The critical bit is to get the relationships absolutely right and that parish and town councils are heavily involved in codesigning the relationship. If we get that right, it will be really exciting"*. Sally then detailed how residents can access WNC services, including via the web and through a growing outreach service, which takes services to residents in their own communities. Finally, Sally then described the Health & Wellbeing Strategy, noting that it applies equally in North Northamptonshire because the strategy is ultimately owned by the countywide Integrated Care Northamptonshire. She said, *"Parish and town councils are the front end of improving wellbeing in communities and many facilities and services you provide feed into the Ten Ambitions in the Health & Wellbeing Strategy."* The delivery plans falling out of the strategy will be developed through the nine Local Area Partnerships (LAPs) in West Northamptonshire with the involvement of parish and town councils. The newly appointed LAP Leads will establish links with the parish and town councils in their area. Sally ended with an appeal to share good news, saying, *"There's lots of amazing things going on where we are really making a difference and we should talk about that and share good practice. And as community leaders, parish and town councils make a massive difference, so thank you for what you do."*

After the formal presentations, Mike Scott chaired a Q&A session where delegates were able to pose any question to the speakers, or to comment on what they said. Several questions related to the slowness of response when parish and town councils need to contact the unitary councils, for example regarding asset transfers, spending developer contributions, planning applications, and highway works. George Candler and Sally Burns said that the unitary councils know they are not perfect, but that progress is being made and things will get better. George Candler said that any parish or town council in North Northamptonshire could contact him at any time and he will always respond. There were several questions relating to the division of focus and service provision between urban and rural areas, particularly in West Northamptonshire in relation to the availability of adult education classes and the new forum for larger councils. Sally Burns said that it is vital to build community resilience in every part of West Northamptonshire and that rural councils were just as important as urban ones. She repeated that Alan Burns is there for all parish and town councils, regardless of size and location. Responding to a question about health and wellbeing and the need for a greater emphasis on and investment in prevention, Sally Burns said that the new LAPs in Northamptonshire will play a key role in ensuring that action plans are evidence-led and that the resources are put in the right places. Several questions related to planning and development control, and George Candler said that a new Head of Planning would be starting at NNC in mid-October, which would make a real difference. Sally Burns said that WNC's Head of Planning had been in post for six months and progress was evident. Both councils are still carrying significant vacancies in their planning departments and are dealing with legacy issues from the former borough and district councils, but things are now stabilising and starting to improve. Finally, a delegate noted that rightly there was a lot of talk about partnership working and creating visions for the future but urged the unitary councils to focus on what matters to residents and to parish and town councils now and to help residents understand who does what saying that parish and town councils often take the blame for what goes wrong, but never get the credit for things that go well. In response George Candler agreed that most residents only see "the council" and don't know – and shouldn't need to know - which council provides which service. He recognised that parish and town councils are often the "front door of local government" and that the unitary councils need to provide timely and accurate information to parish and town councils to pass on to residents.

At the end of the Q&A Mike Scott led a round of applause for the speakers and thanked them very much for their time and participation.

10. Council of the Year Award

DM read out the commendation for the Council of the Year, which was awarded to Rothwell Town Council. DM said: *"This council has massively ramped up its activities over the past six years, and particularly in the past couple of years. The council has had to be brave and bold in raising the precept, from a very low base a decade ago to something workable now, but despite high percentage increases, its Band D tax rate is still less than half the national average. The clerk has led the council to new*

heights and there is no sign of reaching a plateau anytime soon! In a little over two years this clerk has transformed the council and has achieved the CiLCA qualification on top of their day job. It has been very impressive to see. This council has councillors with the experience, skill, and determination to improve the quality of life in this community. I feel like the councillors here have rolled their sleeves up to fight for their community.”

The award was presented to Cllr Ian Jelley and Clerk, Jo Garner, by Northants CALC President, Jeffrey Greenwell.

11. Recognition Awards - CiLCA, Councillor Development Framework, Officer Development Framework, and LCAS Awards

MS recognised the officers that had completed their Certificate in Local Council Administration (CiLCA) since the last conference:

Firstname	Surname	Council
Emily	Arrow	Higham Ferrers Town Council
Ruby	Cole	Holcot/Warkton/Weekley Parish Councils
Jo	Garner	Rothwell Town Council
Amy	Holt	Hartwell/Collingtree Parish Councils
Jane	Mann	Loddington/Cransley Parish Councils
Nicola	Palmer	Bugbrooke Parish Council
Rachel	Raj	Cottingham Parish Council
Alison	Reynolds	Roade Parish Council
Ruth	Scott	Everdon Parish Council
Sarah	Smith	Maidwell with Draughton/Great Oxendon Parish Councils
Gary	Youens	Duston Parish Council
Julie	Thorneycroft	Northampton Town Council
Nicky	Lawrence	Old Stratford Parish Council

MS then recognised the councillors that have achieved an award under the Councillor Development Framework (CDF) and the clerks that have achieved an award under the Officer Development Framework (ODF). A slide was displayed showing all the names and their councils.

And finally, MS recognised Roade Parish Council for achieving “Foundation” standard in the Local Council Award Scheme.

12. Prize Draw & Closing Remarks

MS asked Sally Burns to draw the winner of the prize draw. The luxury hamper, generously donated by Wicksteed Playgrounds, was won by Cllr Ted Nicholl, Mayor of Daventry Town Council.

Mike thanked all of the sponsors and exhibitors, the guest speakers, the team at Moulton Parish Council for hosting, and the staff team at Northants CALC for putting the whole event together.

13. Close.

MS announced that the 77th Annual Conference & AGM will take place on Saturday 5 October 2024 at Moulton Community Centre, and he asked people to put the date in their diaries.

The conference closed at 12:58 p.m.

Signed: _____

Date: _____