

Minutes of the 78th Annual Conference & AGM of the Northamptonshire County Association of Local Councils

Held at Moulton Community Centre, Moulton
Saturday 4 October 2025

Item

1. Welcome & housekeeping.

Northants CALC Deputy CEO, Lesley Sambrook Smith opened the meeting and welcomed delegates. There were 121 attendees in total, with 114 registered councillors and clerks representing sixty-seven member councils. The meeting was chaired by Lynn Lavender (LL), Chair of Northants CALC, who welcomed everyone to the meeting, including delegates, guests, and sponsors.

2. Appointment of Auditor for the year ending 31 March 2026.

RESOLVED: That Kate Brown Accountant be appointed as the auditor for the year ending 31 March 2026.

3. Appointment of Directors for 2025/26.

The Appointments Panel recommended the following for appointment at the AGM:

No.	Name	Qualifying Council
1.	David Fuller	Oundle Town Council
2.	Andrew Holt*	Upton Parish Council
3.	Kate Houlihan	Far Cotton & Delapre Community Council
4.	Lynn Lavender	Ashton Parish Council
5.	Geoff Paul	Moulton Parish Council
6.	Mike Scott	Great Addington Parish Council
7.	Lynne Taylor	Daventry Town Council
8.	Steve Tucker*	Raunds Town Council

*Two directors left the board as of the AGM: Richard Lewis (Rushden Town Council) retired after fifteen years' service, and Greg Lavers (Silverstone Parish Council) resigned due to a change in personal circumstances. The director vacancies were advertised to all member councils and the Appointments Panel held interviews in September 2025. Five very strong applicants were interviewed, and the Appointments Panel agreed unanimously to recommend Andrew Holt and Steve Tucker for appointment at the AGM alongside the remaining six directors.

Jeffrey Greenwell presented Richard Lewis with a small gift in appreciation of his many years of service to the Association, including being chair from 2013 to 2016.

RESOLVED: That the eight candidates be appointed en bloc as directors for the year 2025/26.

4. To approve the minutes of the 77th AGM held on 5 October 2024

The minutes were approved as a true and correct record of the meeting and were signed by the chair.

5. To receive the Annual Report for the year ending 31 March 2025

LL commended the Annual Report and Accounts to the AGM, highlighting that 2024/25 was marked by strong financial performance, with a surplus of £11,762. Key achievements included modernising governance, advancing digital transformation, and regaining “gov.uk” domain eligibility. Support for member councils was reinforced with a new minimum standards policy and investment in audit team qualifications. Nationally, Northants CALC lobbied on clerks’ terms and National Insurance changes. Efforts to boost local election candidacy were successful, positioning the Association well for future challenges.

Mark Hunter, Clerk to Chelveston-cum-Caldecott asked why the accounts appeared to show no Employer pension contributions for 2024/25. DM said that due to a change in presentation, the Employer’s pension figure is now included in “Wages and salaries” rather than as a separate line. DM noted that it would have been helpful to have included an explanatory note to that effect, and will make sure such things are explained in future years.

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

6. To determine subscription levels for the year ending 31 March 2027.

The board of directors recommended that the per council element of the Northants CALC membership fee for the year starting 1 April 2026 and ending 31 March 2027 be increased by inflation (CPIH July 2025 – 4.2%) from £199.03 to £207.39. Further, the board recommended that the per elector element of the Northants CALC membership fee for the year starting 1 April 2026 and ending 31 March 2027 be increased by inflation (CPIH July 2025 – 4.2%) from 29.87 pence to 31.12 pence.

Larger councils (10,000 – 30,000 electorate) are charged a fixed fee for membership of Northants CALC. The fee for the year starting 1 April 2025 and ending 31 March 2026 was £3,184.47. A 4.2% increase would take it to £3,318.22. The total fee payable for YE 31 March 2027 will therefore be (£3,318.22 + NALC Affiliation fee). The equivalent fee for super councils (30,000 + electors) would be increased from £5,784.88 to £6,027.84. The NALC fee is capped at £2,216.00, so the total fee payable will therefore be (£6,027.84 + NALC £2,216.00).

Parish Meetings with less than 100 electors AND no precept are offered affiliate membership for 2026/27 free of charge. The maximum fee that any council or parish meeting pays is capped at £1 per elector.

Cllr Scott Kennedy from Mawsley Parish Council enquired about the board’s policy of increasing the membership by CPIH and DM explained that the board considered that it was important to at least track inflation to avoid falling to far behind and then having a big jump one year. The board considers the budget carefully and whether there are circumstances that would justify a lower-than or greater-than inflation increase, and for 2026/27 it considered that an increase in line with CPIH was adequate.

RESOLVED: That the board’s recommendations be approved.

7. The Unitary Council Leaders

Lynn Lavender hosted a Q&A session with Unitary Council Leaders Cllr Martin Griffiths (North Northamptonshire Council (NNC)) and Cllr Mark Arnall (West Northamptonshire Council (WNC)). Cllr Griffiths expressed strong support for parish and town councils, assuring they would not be compelled to take on unwanted assets or services. He highlighted NNC’s reduced staff turnover and its ambition to become an employer of choice. Cllr Arnall outlined WNC’s challenges, including a £50 million budget gap, and emphasised the need for efficiency without cutting services. He encouraged parish councils to maintain open communication.

Delegates raised concerns about planning, customer service, and asset devolution. Cllr Griffiths addressed legacy planning issues, particularly large warehouse developments, and advocated for solar panels on warehouse roofs. Both leaders acknowledged the need to improve customer service and planning response times, with WNC hiring seven new building control officers. Regarding Household Waste Recycling Centres, Cllr Arnall explained WNC’s booking system to prevent misuse and reduce costs. Both leaders committed to tackling fly-tipping. On devolution, they reaffirmed support for the South Midlands Authority deal and reiterated that asset transfers would only occur with parish consent.

LL thanked both Leaders for their attendance and for their support of open dialogue with parish councils.

8. Keeping Local Government Local – With guest speaker Professor Colin Copus

Professor Colin Copus is Emeritus Professor of Local Politics at De Montfort University. Professor Copus, who previously served as a councillor on multiple tiers, argued that as principal authorities grow larger, the role of parish and town councils becomes "more vital" in keeping local government "rooted in real places". He pointed out that English local government is a "creature of statute," meaning it lacks any independent or constitutionally protected right to exist, allowing central government to dictate its structure. He critiqued the trend towards larger local government units, noting that the UK already has the largest councils in Europe, and continually making them bigger does not guarantee better services or efficiency, but often results in the corrosion of democracy and representation. Colin highlighted that the current push for unitaries with a target population of 500,000 has no clear supporting evidence.

He stressed the unique position of parishes: they are the only tier "not facing an existential threat" that currently plagues counties and districts. This lack of threat places parishes in a position of strength to influence the debate and demand that devolution matches their capacity. He emphasised the importance of CALCs as a unified and strong voice for parishes where cross-board agreement exists, concluding that parish and town councils are the "only thing to survive 'R' day".

9. Council of the Year Award

DM read out the commendation for the Council of the Year, which was awarded to Braybrooke Parish Council. For the first time, in honour of the retiring President, Jeffrey Greenwell, the award was presented as the Jeffrey Greenwell Council of the Year Award.

DM said that Braybrooke Parish Council "...is one of the smaller councils in Northamptonshire, with 340 electors and a precept of just £10,500, yet it has shown what is possible when vision meets determination. In 2025, the council brought to life the Griffin Trail, a transformative walking, wheeling, and cycling route that connects the parish to Market Harborough. This £100,000 project, born from the council's Neighbourhood Plan, responded directly to community demand for safer, scenic and accessible travel routes. It replaced a hazardous route along the road with a gentle, all-weather path that now forms a vital link in the North Northamptonshire Greenway."

The council was also congratulated for embracing Artificial Intelligence as a tool for modern governance.

The award was presented by Jeffrey Greenwell to the Chair of Braybrooke Parish Council, Cllr Paul Hitchcock.

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

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

Firstname	Surname	Council
Lesley	Johnson	Boddington Parish Council
Rebecca	Foote	Greatworth Parish Council
Steve	Fox	Eydon Parish Council
Suzanne	Grant	Wollaston Parish Council
Kerry	Ferrier	Grange Park Parish Council
Nicola	Wright	Walgrave Parish Council
Jennie	Allwork	Hunsbury Meadows Parish Council

LL then recognised the councillors that have achieved an award under the Councillor Development Framework (CDF) – Foundation: Mark Taylor, Stanwick Parish Council, James Affleck, Oundle Town Council, Frank Smethers, Harpole Parish Council; Core: Frank Smethers, Harpole Parish Council; Advanced: Alan Knape, Daventry Town Council; Leader: Alan Knape, Daventry Town Council.

And finally, LL then recognised the clerks that have achieved an award under the Officer Development

Framework (ODF) – Essential: Vicki Horton, Roade Parish Council; Master: Amy Holt, Hartwell Parish Council, and Vicki Horton, Roade Parish Council.

Finally, LL read out a tribute to Jeffrey Greenwell, retiring President, whose role is being discontinued as part of the Association's governance modernisation programme. Jeffrey was the first Chief Executive of the new Northamptonshire County Council in 1973 and was appointed CBE in 1991 for services to local government. LL thanked Jeffrey for his extraordinary service and DM presented him with a silver Jean Pierre pocket watch as a token of the Association's gratitude. Jeffrey said *"What a joy it has been to meet all of you and your predecessors in this marvellous county of ours. I've been so impressed with the spirit of service to the community that I've encountered here in Northamptonshire. Whatever the problem, the local council and the local councillors and their clerk have risen to the occasion. Local communities have always resolved issues with cheerfulness and good spirit and good humour. You have enriched my life by my opportunity to join with you in promoting the values of local government and of community self-help. Parish and town councils are the strength and the future of government in Northamptonshire. You are all heroes and heroines, and I salute you. This has been a wonderful day, and I wish you well and will watch you from the touchlines. Thank you so much for the honour."*

11. Prize Draw & Closing Remarks

DM asked Jeffrey to draw the winner of the prize draw. The winner was Wollaston Parish Council and a hamper generously donated by Wicksteed Play was presented by Jodie Midlane from Wicksteed to Suzanne Grant, Clerk to Wollaston Parish Council.

LL thanked all the sponsors and exhibitors, the parish and town council delegates, the team at Moulton Parish Council for hosting, and the staff at Northants CALC for putting the whole event together.

12. Close.

LL announced that the 79th Annual Conference & AGM will take place on Saturday 3 October 2026 at Moulton Community Centre, and she asked people to put the date in their diaries.

The conference closed at 12:55 p.m.

Signed: _____

Date: _____