

Draft Minutes of the 74th Annual General Meeting of the Northamptonshire County Association of Local Councils

Held at One Angel Square, Northampton
Saturday 2 October 2021

Item

1. Welcome & housekeeping.

Northants CALC Deputy CEO, Lesley Sambrook Smith opened the meeting and welcomed delegates. There were over 110 attendees in total, with 103 registered councillors and clerks representing over fifty member councils. The meeting was chaired by Mike Scott (MS), Chairman of Northants CALC, who welcomed everyone to the meeting and welcomed the new parish and town councils in Northamptonshire: Corby Town Council, Far Cotton and Delapre Community Council, Kettering Town Council, Kingsthorpe Parish Council, Northampton Town Council, and Wellingborough Town Council.

2. Election of President of the Association for the year 2021/22.

Jeffrey Greenwell was elected as President for 2021/22 and MS thanked him for his service to the Association.

The AGM endorsed the recommendation of the board that the role of Vice President be discontinued.

3. Appointment of Auditor to the Association for the year 2021/22.

Kate Brown Associates was appointed as the auditor for 2021/22.

4. To receive the recommendations of the Appointments Panel on persons to be appointed to the board of directors for 2021/22.

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

No.	Name	Qualifying Council
1.	Peter Allen	Towcester Town Council
2.	Chris Horsman	Little Stanion Parish Council
3.	Lynn Lavender	Litchborough Parish Council
4.	Richard Lewis	Rushden Town Council
5.	Geoff Paul	Moulton Parish Council
6.	Mike Scott	Great Addington Parish Council
7.	Lynne Taylor	Daventry Town Council
8.	Vacancy	-

RESOLVED: That the seven candidates be appointed en bloc as directors for the year 2021/22. MS announced that a vacancy notice for the remaining place had been included in the Sept/Oct *eUpdate*.

5. Confirmation of the minutes of the 73rd AGM held on 3 October 2020.

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

6. To receive the Annual Report for the year ending 31 March 2021 including the Annual Statement of Accounts and balance sheet for the year ending 31 March 2021.

MS commended the Annual Report and Accounts to the AGM.

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

7. To determine subscription levels for the year 2022/2023.

The board of directors recommends that the per council element of the Northants CALC membership fee for the year starting 1 April 2022 and ending 31 March 2023 be increased by inflation (CPIH July 2021 – 2.1%) from £163.33 to £166.76, and that the per elector element of the Northants CALC membership fee for the year starting 1 April 2022 and ending 31 March 2023 be increased by inflation (CPIH July 2021 – 2.1%) from 24.51 pence to 25.02 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 2022 and ending 31 March 2023 be increased by inflation (CPIH July 2021 – 2.1%) from £2,613.26 per council to £2,668.14 per council. The total fee payable will therefore be (£2,668.14 + NALC Affiliation fee). The equivalent fee for super councils (30,000 + electors) is increased from £4,747.22 to £4,846.91. The total fee payable will therefore be (£4,846.91 + NALC Affiliation fee).

Parish Meetings with less than 100 electors AND no precept are offered affiliate membership for 2022/23 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. Unitary Northamptonshire – The First Six Months (Unitary Council Perspective)

Cllr Jonathan Nunn, Leader of West Northamptonshire Council (WNC) addressed the conference. He said that parish and town councils were a big part of WNC's plans and that the WNC logo, which had been designed to represent the former principal councils, was now thought to represent the public, private, and voluntary sectors working together. As part of the public sector, it is vital that principal councils and parish and town councils have a culture of collaboration. Cllr Nunn said that culture was extremely important, and that it needed to be in peoples' hearts, not just in their email footers. He said, "*We are on a journey together, we are not there yet*". He said that WNC's finances are in good shape and that a strategy has been published. A new Councillor Empowerment Fund is being launched and Cllr Nunn urged all parish and town councils to talk to their WNC ward members. He said he was aware of different levels of engagement between parishes and ward members and that a standard service level could be designed to set out the expectations. Cllr Nunn said that "*Working together, we can create something very exciting*".

Cllr David Howes, Portfolio Holder for Rural Communities and Localism at North Northamptonshire Council (NNC) addressed the conference. He noted the challenges that setting up the unitary council had thrown up but said that "business as usual" and "safe and legal" had been achieved, as well as doing some new things. Strategies are being set out and a new Corporate Plan is currently out for consultation. The boundaries of the four former local government districts are retained for the purposes of planning and development control, with a Local Area Planning Committee for each one, and planning is seen as a very important interface between the unitary council and residents. Cllr Howes said that parish and town councils are very important and that a list of contact details for senior officers had been circulated to them to ensure they knew who to speak to. He wanted to see parish and town councils treated as partners and noted that NNC's Chief Executive had reinforced that ethos at staff meetings. Cllr Howes referenced devolution and committed that nothing will be "done to" parish and town councils. He said, "*You must feel part of the process – we want to be working with you and listening*". Cllr Howes said, "*We need to communicate better; we're not there yet*" and he urged parish and town councils to help by sharing community intelligence via a new single point of contact for parish and town councils and asked for mutual understanding that there will be challenges ahead.

MS thanked the guest speakers for the presentations and invited questions from the audience, which ranged from how to set the right culture of the unitary councils, to the financial savings that they will achieve, and how it was important to bring all services up to the highest standard achieved by the former principal councils, not reduce levels to the lowest common denominator.

MS thanked the audience for their questions and comments and the speakers again for their responses.

9. Unitary Northamptonshire – The First Six Months (Parish & Town Council Perspective)

Five speakers from member parish and town councils had been invited to give their thoughts on the first six months of unitary local government in Northamptonshire.

Deborah Rush, Clerk to Cogenhoe & Whiston Parish Council (in West Northamptonshire) and Grendon Parish Council (in North Northamptonshire), said that the ward councillors were trying to engage. Operationally there are frustrations and highways are taking longer to respond. The ERP Gold accounting system that WNC uses is frustrating, and it is more complex to invoice the unitary councils for the Village Hopper service than previously as the invoices now have to be broken down per journey and per stop. Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) has generated a lot of extra work for clerks. Neither council yet identifies as “west” or “north”. Residents don’t really understand LGR, or where they should now go to for help, so a residents’ help desk is being set up during coffee mornings to provide a local signposting service. Deborah Rush said *“We know our residents best. If you work with us, we can help”*.

Mark Hunter, Clerk to Chelveston-cum-Caldecott Parish Council (in North Northamptonshire), praised the engagement from NNC ward councillors. Operationally it was not going so well, as the NNC telephone system is tortuous, the SPOC details haven’t yet been published, and the Registers of Members Interests forms had taken a long time to appear on the NNC web site. He asked for better comms and that the NNC Councillors’ Briefing being circulated to parish and town councils. He noted that NNC wants to work with parish and town councils but cited the litter bins and fly tipping strategy document, which didn’t mention parish and town councils at all. Cllr Graham Lawman has agreed to change that. Mark Hunter described the Lengthsman that had been employed in the parish and called upon NNC to be less risk-averse regarding such initiatives than Northamptonshire County Council had been. He said, *“Please treat parish and town councils as serious partners”*.

Cllr Sam Kilby-Shaw, Chairman of Kingsthorpe Parish Council (in West Northamptonshire), said that being so new the council did not yet have a true sense of identity and that it was a large parish with a diverse demographic. He said that the KPC councillors were gaining experience, skills, and knowledge and have been working hard on initiatives, such as reopening Kingsthorpe library. He said there had been limited contact with the WNC ward members so far, but what contact there had been was good. There was also good contact with Jonathan Nunn and the local MP, Michael Ellis. Sam Kilby-Shaw said, *“We can’t judge collaboration yet, but if we work together, we can work through any problems”*.

Cllr Pat Scouse, Chairman of Broughton Parish Council (in North Northamptonshire), reported that engagement with the NNC ward councillors had been mixed. She said that Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) had been a big task but that we should not lose sight of the grass roots and that parish and town councils can play a vital role in providing local services. The network of parish and town councillors in the county is an underused resource that could be used to convey the unitary councils’ messages to individual communities. Pat Scouse said that parish and town councils operate under the radar of the unitary councils and that a little thought would go a long way and that working collaboratively the tiers of local government could achieve a great deal. She cited climate change as an issue that parish and town councils could help embed in local action. She said, *“We need to move beyond “them and us”. Reach out to the knowledge represented here today. We can make Northamptonshire a clean, green, shining example”*.

Gary Youens, Clerk to Duston Parish Council (in West Northamptonshire), said that it was early days, but there was a determination all round to make unitary local government work and that unitary was a good model overall being more joined up and with less relational distraction than had existed previously. He said that the unitary councils must now concentrate on statutory strategic services, but that creates a large distance between the unitary councils and individual communities. Duston Parish Council has gone from being 1 of 10 councils in the borough of Northampton, to being 1 of 165 in West Northamptonshire. If they wish, parish and town councils can fill the void at community level. Gary Youens said that WNC ward councillors and parish and town councils need each other. He said that it was going to be hard for WNC to have an individual relationship with each parish and town council and called for some sort of Memorandum or Charter to be developed. He called for harmonisation of services across West Northamptonshire, citing the fact that WNC operates allotments in Duston, whereas in other areas that function is typically discharged by parish and town councils. Gary Youens said, *“With the Borough Council now gone we are working with our neighbours more and meeting with them more regularly to discuss common issues. In due course we look forward to extending and building that relationship with other councils in West Northamptonshire.”*

MS thanked all the parish speakers and invited Cllrs Nunn and Howes to reply if they wished.

Cllr Nunn said that he had listened to what had been said and that he needed to reiterate to senior officers at WNC that parish and town councils are important. He took on board the ERP Gold issue. He said that it will take time to build the identity of “West Northamptonshire” because it is not a physical place on a map, but that in some respects in residents had not noticed any change then that was a measure of success because services had continued uninterrupted. He said that WNC’s leadership was working incredibly hard and that sometimes response times were longer than desirable. Cllr Nunn said that a new standard for how ward councillors work with parish and town councils would be developed and that harmonisation and devolution of services would be a key piece of work over the next few years.

Cllr Howes said that he attends all meetings of Desborough Town Council in his ward and that principal councillor attendance at parish and town council meetings should be encouraged. He asked parish and town councils to let him know if there were difficulties. He said that NNC had to get rural public transport right for the whole area. He said that hearing from the parish and town councils at the conference had been the best part and that he saw it as a potential model for the new Kettering & Corby, and Wellingborough & East Northants Parish Forums.

MS thanked the guests and all delegates for engaging in a very useful session.

10. Presentation of Council of the Year

Danny Moody said that it had been a tough year for everyone and that in some ways 2021 had been even harder than 2020. Parish and town councils had come to the fore and had put in an enormous effort looking after their communities. He said *“This year, and for one year only, and in this the most difficult year, the award for Council of the Year goes to each and every one of you that is still standing. If you are still standing after the biggest reorganisation of local government in this county for over 50 years. If you are still standing after the local elections in May, and the six-year term of office that they brought to an end. If you are still standing after all that a global pandemic can throw at you. If you are still standing, despite everything, then you deserve this award. Northants CALC is very proud to award the 2021 Council of the Year to all councils in Northamptonshire that are still standing.”*

He then called on all those present to give each other a big round of applause, before calling on Mike Scott as Chairman of Northants CALC to accept the award on behalf of all parish and town councils in Northamptonshire.

11. Recognition Awards

MS noted the retirement of three vice presidents: Catherine Lomax, Gwen Radcliffe, and Gordon Shorley. Catherine had been presented with flowers and a gift immediately after the refreshment break and had said that she had enjoyed immensely her association with parish and town councils over many decades.

Gwen Radcliffe and Gordon Shorley, who were not able to be at the conference, will receive their presentations later.

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

Name	Council
Marie Reilly	Northants CALC
Marika Iacobucci	No council
Jenny Rice	Easton on the Hill
Lorna McGoldrick	Walgrave
Katrina Jones	Scaldwell/Creaton
Sarah Fox	Daventry

In a new section for this year, MS recognised the councillors that have achieved an award under the Councillor Development Framework (CDF):

Name	Council
Miranda Wixon	Towcester/Roade
Lorne Murray	Roade
Didier Ramsden	Boddington Parish Council

And lastly, Danny Moody thanked WNC for hosting the event at One Angel Square and he asked Cllr Nunn to draw the winner of the prize draw. The £300 in vouchers and a bottle of prosecco, generously donated by Wicksteed Playgrounds, was won by Roade Parish Council.

12. Close.

MS thanked the sponsors for their generous support, Cllrs Howes and Nunn for their presentations and positive engagement, and all the delegates for their attendance and participation.

MS said that the 2022 Conference & AGM will take place on Saturday 1 October 2022 and asked people to put the date in their diaries.

The meeting closed at 12:56 p.m.

Signed: _____

Date: _____