



**MINUTES OF MEMBERS' MEETING ON WEDNESDAY 17 NOVEMBER 2021 HELD AT
THE ARMAGH CITY HOTEL & BY ZOOM**

ATTENDEES

Aldermen

Frazer Agnew
Alan McDowell

Angus Carson
Stephen Moutray

Robert Gibson
Jim Speers

Councillors

Alison Bennington
Joe Boyle
Derek McKinney
Charlie Casey

Vera McWilliam
Hazel Legge
Terry Andrews
Dermot Curran

Billy Webb
Beth Adger
Robert Burgess

Kate Wilson (Admin Assistant)

ZOOM ATTENDEES

Councillors

Ben Mallon
Victor Warrington

Eddie Thompson
Tommy Nicholl

Diana Armstrong
Christine McFlynn

APOLOGIES

Aldermen

Tommy Sandford
Michael Henderson

Derek Hussey
Stephen Martin

Amanda Grehan

Councillors

Ruairi McHugh
Michael Ruane

Niamh Doris

Valerie Harte

1. Chairman's Welcome

The NAC Chair, Cllr Andrews welcomed members present at the Armagh City Hotel and those in attendance virtually by Zoom saying it is nice to have them here in hybrid mode. He advised that Derek McCallan, Chief Executive of NILGA will be retiring shortly, saying that he was a good friend and colleague of the NAC and if we ever called upon him, he made himself and his team at NILGA available, Cllr Andrews said he would like to thank Derek for all his work and he wished him a long and happy retirement. He also thanked his predecessor as Chair of the NAC, Ald Tommy Sandford, for all his hard work as Chair and his contribution to the Executive Committee, saying that there is always an open door for him at the NAC meetings.

Apologies received by email, marked in the Attendance Book, and as informed today are as listed above.

2. Minutes of last Meeting

The minutes of the last Members' Meeting which took place on 15 September 2021 were agreed by all, as proposed by Cllr Curran, and seconded by Cllr Adger.

3. Matters Arising from the Minutes - None.

4. Officers Reports – Treasurer & Secretary

The Treasurer, Ald Carson said it was good to see everyone here today in Armagh and he went on to inform them of the Current Account bank balance amount from the bank statement dated 13 October 2021.

The Chair thanked Ald Carson and asked for a proposer and seconder for the Treasurers Report, this was accepted by all as proposed by Cllr Casey and seconded by Cllr Bennington.

The Secretary, Cllr Boyle said Good Morning and asked if all had signed the Attendance Book and if not to please do so, and secondly for all present to turn off their mobile phones. He then read his report as follows:

Secretary's Report

Actions from the last Members' Meeting

- We sent a condolence letter and sympathy card to Mrs Ruth Hamill following the death of her husband Cllr Paul Hamill of Antrim & Newtownabbey BC.
- We wrote to the Finance Minister, Conor Murphy, MLA to asking if we can circulate his response letter to the NAC's request for a review of the criteria in relation to the COVID-19 funding applications for businesses and organisations. Minister Murphy has approved this request and we will circulate the letter to members.
- We wrote to Councils asking if they can accommodate the NAC by providing a meeting room with capability for audio/visual set-up to allow remote access so that Hybrid Meetings can be arranged.
 - ~ Five councils have not yet replied (ABC, DC&S, M&EA, MU, and NM&D)
 - ~Two have advised that they are not hosting meetings for external organisations (AND and BCC)
 - ~One has stated that they hosted us during March 2020 and as councils host on a rotational basis they will look into it when it is their turn again (A&NTA)
 - ~One asked for dates to check, these were sent but nothing back yet (LCCC)
 - ~One can host up to fourteen attendees only (F&O)
 - ~One has Town Halls and Meeting rooms open for booking (CC&G)

We will keep across this and keep monitoring it as it is our preference to hold meetings within local government premises.

NILGOSC Presentation – Death Grant changes

Following the presentation by Ruth Benson of NILGOSC at our last Members Meeting on 15 September, I received an email from Ruth in relation to the questions about the Death Grant cap. She advised that amendments put forward by NILGOSC are to be sent out for consultation by the DfC and removing the age 75 cap on deaths grants is included.

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Subsequently we received an invitation from the DfC to respond to their Consultation document with the closing date for receipt of comments being 10 December 2021. We are currently working on our response.

NAC NI Newsletter

This was circulated to all members on 11th October 2021.

SENI sponsorship

Sponsorship was approved once again for this year's Social Enterprise Awards Event which was held virtually on 15th October 2021. We got a better deal than usual this year as they gave us a full-page advert in the Awards Brochure for the price of a half page.

Request received for Meeting Dates and Minutes

Following a request received last month from Mid & East Antrim Council, Anne Beacom, Senior Committee Administrator was given the date of our upcoming Members' meeting and advised that the approved minutes of our meetings are available on the NAC website.

NAC NI AGM

This took place on Friday 15 October 2021 at the Glenavon Hotel in Cookstown with 38 Attendees. The event went well with invited guests from NAC UK, NILGA, AILG and LAMA in attendance.

Whilst Senator Mark Daly joined us on Thursday evening, he could not stay over for the AGM, but he gave an interesting overview of his background and work at the Senate of Ireland and spoke of how proud he is to be the first Senate chair from Kerry. He outlined an idea that he has for the Senate's 100th anniversary next year, whereby an invite will be extended to all 11 NI Councils to individually attend an event hosted by him – one each month over the year, he said that further details will be provided when available. However, I asked him to consider dealing with the NAC on this as if the invites go to councils they could be noted and may go any further. We could organise this better as we have eight delegates representing each council here and I have reassured him that the NAC are best placed to oversee this. Since then, he has confirmed that he is happy to work with the NAC on this.

At the meeting the new EC was formed with a change of Chair to Cllr Terry Andrews, Senior Vice Chair is now Ald Alan McDowell, Junior Vice Chair is now Cllr Valerie Harte and Women's Representative is Cllr Hazel Legge.

Ald Henderson was co-opted on to the committee at the November meeting due to his involvement and knowledge in relation to the Local Government Training Scheme, NILGA and the NAC equality campaign over the past years but he will have no voting rights to avoid distorting the balance of the party representation at meetings.

Photographs taken during the AGM are available on the NAC Website,

Councillor Long Service Awards

During the AGM, Long Service Awards were presented to the four members that were present and since then we have passed on awards to those that were not in attendance - Cllr Sean Clarke of Fermanagh & Omagh DC and Cllr Henry Reilly of Newry, Mourne & Down DC.

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NAC UK Conference and AGM - 26 to 28 November 2021

Details of this event have been circulated to Members and Councils.

At the UK AGM, Cllr Casey will become National Chair and Cllr Adger has been put forward as the NAC NI nomination for the position of incoming Vice President. (There may be nominations from other regions for the Vice President position).

NAC Business Plan

This is being progressed, firstly in consultation with NILGA, and I am currently waiting for them to come back with a report for consideration by the EC. NILGA are a similar organisation to us only bigger and therefore between the two of us we should be able to produce a structure to move forward on.

Partnership Panel Meeting

This took place on Wednesday 20th October by Zoom with the NAC Chair, Cllr Andrews in attendance as an observer representing the NAC.

Councillor Equality Meetings

The DfC agreed dates for a series of four meetings to take place before the end of the year. A Sub-Committee from the NAC have attended the first two meetings with Mr Carleton, Mr Glass and Ms Broadway at Causeway Exchange on 26th October and 9th November with the following two scheduled meetings scheduled for 30th November 2021, and 21st December 2021.

Legal Assistance request from LCCC

Following a request received from Wendy Hughes, PA to the CE at LCCC that this matter has been discussed by the NAC Executive Committee (EC) and is on-going.

End of Secretary's Report

The Chair asked if there were any questions for the Secretary, Cllr Boyle explained that there is a lot of communication going on with councils and hospitality venues in terms of securing meeting facilities, and on the councillor equality issues that are being raised with the DfC by the NAC sub-committee, adding that members will be kept updated on progress made.

Cllr Andrews then handed over to the Chair of the NAC Sub Committee Group, Ald McDowell for an update on the meetings with DfC.

Ald McDowell reported that the group have had two meetings so far, at the first one they outlined details of the matters of concern that have been raised by our members and at the second meeting, just a week ago, a request for a review was put forward due to the last one being carried out some years ago and a further review had been envisaged following the first term of office under the new councils. Although the NAC are unable to find evidence of this, we feel this would be good practice in terms of the changes to the councillor workload, role, and responsibilities over recent years. Items put forward to be included in the review are allowances, severance pay, equality across councils for mileage and provisions made to councillors. The DfC officials are going to pull together a report for the Minister on this and will be including Terms of Reference for a Review Committee which they think may made up of members from the NAC, NILGA, an Independent and a Ratepayer.

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It was put forward for the review to be conducted within a six-month period. The officials will be preparing a paper to put to the Minister shortly, possibility in December, and it would be useful if anyone is in contact with the Minister that they could make her aware that a report will be arriving on her desk soon.

Ald McDowell summed up saying that awards for councillor allowances should be made by an independent body so that councillors or councils cannot reduce allowance and mileage amounts or materials awarded as this has led to inequality across councils.

Cllr Andrews thanked Ald McDowell for his input and report and mentioned the increase in allowances recently awarded to councillors in the south of Ireland.

Other members shared information in relation to this matter based on first-hand experiences within their councils.

Cllr Boyle said the search for evidence on the promised review is ongoing.

5. Any Other Business

Cllr Boyle explained the difficulties with securing meeting venues and advised that dates are currently being compiled for the NAC 2022 meetings.

A suggestion was put forward that the NAC Officers could attend in-person at Council Chambers with other members joining by Zoom virtually. Cllr Boyle said this could be checked.

6. Next Meeting Date

The Chair advised this is to be confirmed and details will be circulated when arrangements are in place. He thanked everyone for their input and the meeting ended.