



**MINUTES OF THE MEMBERS' MEETING ON WEDNESDAY 19 FEBRUARY 2020 HELD
AT MOSSLEY MILL, NEWTOWNABBEY**

ATTENDEES

Aldermen

Tommy Sandford (Chair)
Bill Keery MBE

Frazer Agnew MBE
Alan McDowell

John Smyth
Robin Cherry MBE

Councillors

Joe Boyle (Secretary)
Joan Baird OBE
Victor Warrington
Rodney Quigley
Charlie Casey

Alison Bennington
Diana Armstrong
Hon Nicholas Trimble
Terry Andrews
Valerie Harte

Billy Webb MBE
Sean Clarke
Beth Adger MBE
Robert Burgess
Michael Ruane

Kate Wilson (Admin Assistant)

APOLOGIES

Aldermen

Angus Carson (Treasurer)
Jim Rogers OBE
Michael Henderson MBE

Stephen Moutray
Sharon McKillop
Tommy Nicholl MBE

Jim Speers MBE
Stephen Martin

Councillors

Fiona Ferguson
JJ Magee
Dermot Nicholl
Hazel Legge
Dermot Curran

Eric Harvey
Stephen Magennis
Stephen McCann
Timothy Gaston

Tracy Kelly
Dale Pankhurst
Errol Thompson
Niamh Doris

The NAC Chair, Ald Sandford thanked everyone for attending and he introduced Ald John Smyth, the Mayor of Antrim & Newtownabbey Borough Council. Ald Smyth who was in attendance prior to the meeting to personally welcome delegates, then addressed the NAC Chair, Aldermen and Councillors, welcoming them to "not only the best borough in Northern Ireland, but following a recent award, the best borough in Ireland". He was referring to the borough's success at the December 2019 all Ireland IPB Pride of Place Awards where they were named as the Best Local Authority. Ald Smyth finished up his welcome address by handing back to the chair and wishing him and the Officers a good meeting, he then stayed to attend the meeting.

The chair thanked Antrim & Newtownabbey Borough Council for hosting today's meeting and Ald Smyth for attending and welcoming the NAC Members. He then passed over to the Secretary, Cllr Boyle who informed the members that the NAC Treasurer, Ald Angus Carson was currently in hospital and said our thoughts and prayers were with him, Ald Sandford said that perhaps a card would be appropriate to let Ald Carson know that we are thinking of him, this was agreed by all. The meeting then commenced.

1. Apologies

Those received by phone/email in advance and stated or ticked in the Attendance Book today are as detailed on page 1. Cllr Adger advised that Ald Nicholl is at dialysis and will try to attend afterwards.

2. Minutes of last meeting

Agreed by all as proposed by Cllr Burgess and seconded by Cllr Bennington.

3. Matters arising from the minutes

Cllr Boyle stated that a lot will be touched upon within his Secretary's Report.

4. Reports from officers (*Discussion notes and points raised are in italics*)

Treasurer's Report

Cllr Boyle, doubling up for the Treasurer today, provided a finance report stating the bank balance at the end of December and providing details of expenditure since the last report which was provided at the Members' Meeting in November. *This was accepted by all as proposed by Cllr Andrews and seconded by Cllr Warrington.*

Secretary's Report

NAC National Vice Chair

Following the discussions at our last meeting, Cllr Casey was elected as National Vice-Chair at the NAC UK Annual General Meeting and Conference which took place during November 2019 in Chester. The position, which is appointed on a regional rotational basis, will be for a period of two years.

Congratulations were extended to Cllr Casey and it was noted that Cllr Adger has been appointed on to the NAC UK Executive Committee and congratulations were also extended to Cllr Adger by all.

Ombudsman's Office Meeting

Representatives from the NAC and NILGA met with Mr McFadden (deputy Ombudsman) and his colleague Mrs McAleer at their offices on 14 November. It was agreed that it is important that we have a constructive relationship and they answered the questions that were asked. Following the meeting they provided statistics on complaints received and Mr McFadden offered to come along to talk to our members to explain processes and answer any questions. *The Secretary asked if the members would like to take up this offer. Cllr Armstrong proposed we should do this as it would provide a good opportunity to speak to him, Cllr Andrews seconded this, and it was strongly agreed by all that this should be arranged for the next Members' Meeting if he is available.*

DfC Officials Meeting

NAC and NILGA representatives attended a meeting with officials from Tracy Meharg's office on 19 November and issues regarding the Code of Conduct were discussed. Following this we applied to Minister Hargrey MLA, on 14 January 2020 for dispensations for NAC Delegates to allow them to participate in discussions at council meetings in relation to the NAC. We have also followed up on this with Louise Warde Hunter and Anthony Carleton of DfC on 29 January 2020.

Cllr Boyle further outlined the problems around declaring interests whereby members must leave council discussions which are about outside organisations that they belong to.

SOLACE Meeting

This meeting took place on 17 January at the NILGA offices, with attendees from SOLACE, NILGA and the NAC. All items that we put forward for the agenda were discussed and the SOLACE Chair agreed to raise the points made at their next meeting on 7 February. It was also agreed that further meetings may be helpful. The meeting minutes and actions list have been received.

We have written to the DfC Minister Deirdre Hargey requesting the review of the Code of Conduct to be progressed as agreed.

Cllr Boyle explained the working relationship between the NAC and NILGA. He went through the items that were raised at the SOLACE Meeting and said that we will follow up on this.

LGTG Meeting

This meeting took place on 22 January at Bangor Town Hall. Since our last meeting we had wrote to all councils asking for their input and the feedback we received was included in the NAC's input section of the meeting.

It was reported that the LGTG review process may be slightly delayed due to non-appointment of consultants but this should be resolved soon and Mr Stephen Reid said we will be kept informed of significant updates that may take place before our next meeting on 22 April 2020.

Councillor Wellbeing

The NAC Executive Committee met on Monday 17 February 2020 to exclusively discuss current councillor issues and the topics debated included mental health, social media abuse, equality, severance pay, NAC status. Actions decided on from this meeting will now be carried out and reviewed by the Executive Committee at a meeting on Monday 9 March 2020. Councillors will be updated on progress being made.

Cllr Boyle explained that we have been working to get the support of the political parties and have already met with SF, DUP and UUP, we have written to the SDLP and APNI to request meetings with them.

NILGA Awards

The NILGA Conference and Awards evening will take place on Thursday 20 February 2020.

The Secretary asked if there were any questions in relation to his report and there were none.

5. AOB

The Secretary asked if there were any items that officers would like to raise, and the following items were put forward and discussed:

- Cllr Armstrong raised an issue around the lack of prosecutions in relation to dog control. *Members then expressed that prosecutions had taken place within their council areas and this is an issue that officers within respective councils would deal with as and when presented to their council borough/district. If the NAC became more informed of these type of incidents within council areas and to as and how they are dealt with then they will report back to the members' forum.*
- Cllr Warrington advised that Fermanagh & Omagh District Council have a new Chief Executive - Alison McCullagh.

- Recent threats to SF MLA's
There was strong condemnation of this from members present and it was agreed by all that this is shocking and unacceptable.
- Social Media Abuse and damaging media coverage
This is a growing concern and many members have been affected or are aware of others who have had to deal with this. Points noted were:

There can be abuse from incidents that happened several years ago.

Controllers of Social Media should be acting on this.

Problems encountered whilst canvassing and how councillors are targeted in relation to the public's grievances with MP's and MLA's.

Misleading newspaper articles that can also appear on google.

Untrue allegations appearing in the media.

Members were informed that the NAC Executive Committee have discussed this matter and would like to reach out to support our members who have experienced problems. If elected members would like assistance with dealing with this, they are urged to contact the NAC office or officers.

The idea was put forward for councillors to have insurance to cover solicitor costs if they feel that they must take people to court over untrue allegations, this will be further discussed by the EC.

6. Next Meeting Date

Next Members' Meeting will be on Wednesday 15 April 2020 hosted by Ards & North Down Borough Council and the venue has now been confirmed as The Craig Room, Town Hall, The Castle, Bangor, BT20 4BT

DECISIONS TAKEN

- Arrange to send a card to the Treasurer, Ald Angus Carson wishing him well.
- The EC to discuss the idea put forward for insurance for councillors to cover solicitor costs if they feel that they must take people to court over untrue allegations in the media.