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**MINUTES OF MEMBERS' MEETING MEETING**

**WEDNESDAY 19 JULY 2023**

**NEWRY CONFERENCE CENTRE 39-41 The Mall Newry BT34 1AT**

**ATTENDEES**

Aldermen

Beth Adger

Alan McDowell

Derek Hussey

Stephen Moutray

Keith Kerrigan

Councillors

Terry Andrews

Jim Brennan

Alan Lewis

Trevor Wilson

Glenn Barr

Roy Crawford

Gretta Thompson

Billy Webb

Joe Boyle

Valerie Harte

Victor Warrington

Kate Wilson (Admin Assistant)

**APOLOGIES**

Aldermen

Allan Bresland

Hazel Legge

Councillors

Alan Barr

Stephen Cosgrove

Stephen McCann

Gregg McKeen

Martin Reilly

Matthew Warwick

Alison Bennington

John Gallen

Eugene McConnell

Samuel Nelson

Kevin Savage

Andrew Wilson

Thomas Beckett

Chelsea Harwood

Christine McFlynn

Declan Norris

Errol Thompson

1. Welcome & Apologies

The NAC Chair, Cllr Terry Andrews opened the meeting saying a “warm welcome to you all”. He introduced Cllr Valerie Harte, saying that Cllr Harte serves on the NAC Executive Committee (EC) and that in June this year she was appointed as Chair of Newry & Mourne District Council. Cllr Harte then welcomed the NAC Members to Newry; saying that she is pleased to see everyone here today and hopes that they all have a good meeting, she mentioned that the council were unable host this meeting as they currently don't have a chamber available and then handed back to Cllr Andrews.

Cllr Andrews advised that John McCardle, former councillor and mayor at Newry, Mourne & Down DC had passed away on 9 July, he said “our thoughts and prayers are with his family and any other members that have had family bereavements”.

A minute silence was then observed as a mark of respect.

Cllr Andrews then introduced himself, advising that he has been serving as Chair of the NAC since October 2021 and that he is a councillor at Newry, Mourne & Down DC representing the Rowallane district. He said that as this is the first NAC Members Meeting following the elections he would like to give all members the opportunity to introduce themselves starting with the NAC Executive Committee (EC).

Ald Beth Adger introduced herself as the NAC National President and said that she represents the Braid district at Mid & East Antrim BC, the NAC Regional Secretary, Cllr Joe Boyle advised that he has held this position with the NAC for seven years now and he represents Ards Peninsula district at Ards & North Down DC, Ald Alan McDowell said he is the NAC Senior Vice Chair and serves on Ards & North Down DC representing Newtownards district, Cllr Valerie Harte said she is the NAC Junior Vice Chair and represents Newry district on her council and Cllr Billy Webb said he is the interim Treasurer for the NAC and serves on Antrim & Newtownabbey BC representing the Macedon district, then each attendee introduced themselves giving their name, council and the district that they service.

Cllr Boyle then read out the list of names from which apologies had been received and these are as listed on Page 1.

2. Minutes of last Meeting held on 15 March 2023

Referring to the Minutes of the last meeting, Cllr Boyle explained that the NAC Treasurer, Ald Carson has now retired, and that Cllr Webb is interim treasurer until the AGM. He also explained the Special General Meeting aspect of the last meeting which related to approval of amendments to the NAC NI Constitution, saying that he and Cllr Webb are aiming to have agreement for the amended document can be implemented from the AGM and this is included in his report.

At this point, Ald Adger said that she would like to place on record a big thank you on behalf of the EC for those members that had retired or didn't get re-elected as their input over the years was very much appreciated.

The minutes of the last Members' Meeting were then proposed as a true and accurate record by Cllr Billy Webb, seconded by Ald Beth Adger, and agreed by all.

3. Officers Reports – Treasurer, Secretary and National President

**Treasurer's Report**

The Treasurer, Cllr Webb advised that the accounting year end for the NAC is 31 July 2023 therefore his report is a good indication of how things will look at the year-end but there will be a few more transactions to be added over the coming weeks. He advised the total income and outgoings to date and the bank balances for the bank accounts concluding that the organisations finances were in a healthy state.

The Treasurer's report was accepted by all as proposed by Ald Beth Adger and seconded by Cllr Harte.

**Secretary's Report**

Cllr Boyle delivered his report as follows:

Thank you, Members, I will now provide an update on activities since our last Members Meeting which took place on Wednesday 15 March 2023 at The Braid in Ballymena.

Any comments or questions can be put forward at the end of my report for discussion.

### NAC Leadership & Change in Local Enterprise Workshop

This event took place at the Craigavon Civic and Conference Centre on Thursday 23<sup>rd</sup> March 2023 with 26 attendees. Feedback from the event has been very positive and the event facilitator, Derek McCallan has sent a report on the event to the NAC EC. We are arranging a follow-up meeting with Derek to discuss this and follow-up actions, further details will be provided to Members on this in due course.

### Amended Constitution

The draft Constitution was updated according to a proposal made at the last members' meeting, and it was then circulated to all Councils on 22<sup>nd</sup> March, asking for it to be presented at their next Council meeting and asking for any comments to be provided by 28<sup>th</sup> April 2023. Replies were received from Ards and North Down and Lisburn and Castlereagh City Council. These are being dealt with by the NAC EC and updates will be provided.

### EC Members Update

The EC met on 5<sup>th</sup> June and 3<sup>rd</sup> July 2023.

Ald Angus Carson has now retired and EC Member Cllr Billy Webb is carrying out the Treasurer duties for the organisation on an interim basis. Cllr Dermot Curran, the EC SDLP representative has also retired and other EC members that were not returned at the recent elections are Cllr Robert Burgess and Ald Michael Henderson.

The EC has agreed that the vacancies will be filled at the AGM taking place in October. Vacancies – Treasurer, SDLP Representative, Sinn Fein Representative (since Charlie retired in December), Ulster Unionist Representative, Independent Representative (vacant since May 2019), TUV (never represented).

### Councillors Review

This was agreed by former Department for Communities (DfC) Minister Dierdre Hargey MLA but with no ministers and no executive in place things have been slow. However, the NAC EC have been meeting regularly with senior DfC officials and in February they provided us with a timeline of actions working toward the Councillors review.

The DfC are currently recruiting for a Chair to head up the review panel and details of this were circulated to all our members on 12 July 2023. The timeframe for this process is running on course with the advertisement for a Chair having been issued on schedule. We will keep members updated.

### Members Meetings

These meetings take place bi-monthly and they rotate around the eleven councils, the meetings are arranged at the start of each year and when confirmed the dates and the council area are circulated and details are included on the meetings page of the NAC website. Sometimes due to unforeseen circumstances meetings may have to be re-arranged or held at a non-council venue within the designated region and this meeting today had to be held on an in-person basis only due to a last-minute change of venue.

Our next meeting will be held at The Guildhall in L'Derry on Wednesday 20 September 2023, and we hope that this can be carried out in hybrid format using the council facilities.

### AGM Planning

The AGM is scheduled to take place on Friday 20 October 2023 in the Glenavon House Hotel in Cookstown. Further details will be circulated to all members in due course.

As in previous years we will be inviting members from our South of Ireland counterparts AILG and LAMA with whom a good relationship has been developed over the years, Cllr Andrews and I attended the AILG conference which took place in the Canal Court Hotel here in Newry on 12<sup>th</sup>/13<sup>th</sup> July as invited guests and we will continue to build the relationship between our organisations.

### **End of Secretary's Report**

Ald McDowell explained that he is Chair of the NAC delegation that is working on this with the DfC and he provided an overview of the process so far.

There was then further discussion on the Councillors Review process with input from various members and points noted from this were:

- *The review by an Independent Panel is the way to go as councillors should not have a say in reducing allowances or mileage rates.*
- *There should not be discrepancies between councils on provisions and services they provide to councillors.*
- *Special Allowance amounts for planning committee councillors needs investigated as it can be difficult to get councillors to fill positions on these.*
- *The word "Maximum" in the councillors allowance structure cannot be removed without legislation.*
- *Terms and Conditions for councillors in the South of Ireland are much better than here and Severance pay is made to councillors who stand down or lose their seats.*
- *All parties support the review.*

### **National President's Report**

Ald Adger advised that due to the elections she was unable to attend the last NAC UK Conference however she hopes to be at the next one.

#### 4. Any Other Business

Cllr Webb raised the HMRC tax relief that is available to councillors for expenses in relation to constituency work and associate mileage, following discussion it was agreed that information for this should to be sent out to all members. Cllr Webb proposed that we write to NAC UK asking them to request an increase in the working from home allowance which has been the same for 25 years. (£135), this was seconded by Cllr Crawford and agreed by all.

#### 5. Closing Remarks and Meeting End

Cllr Andrews advised that Kate will be retiring from her position of NAC Administrative Assistant in August, and he said that he was sad to report that this will be Kate's last Members' Meeting. He thanked Kate for all the work she has done in supporting the Executive Committee (EC) over the

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past five years, he then handed over to Cllr Boyle who also thanked Kate for her assistance and commended her for making sure that things got done and that all meetings ran smoothly. The other EC members - Ald Adger, Cllr Harte, Ald McDowell and Cllr Webb each thanked Kate and wished her well for the future. Members then added kind comments, thanks and best wishes to Kate.

Cllr Andrews announced that the next Members' Meeting will be hosted by Derry City & Strabane DC at The Guildhall on Wednesday September 2023.

Decisions/Actions Summary	By
Work towards having NAC Constitution draft document agreed for approval and implementation at the AGM in October 2023	JB
Provide information to all members on the HMRC tax relief available, Cllr Webb to check if the guidance on the NAC Website Information page is up to date.	JB/KW BW
Write to NAC UK requesting that they approach HMRC to ask for the tax relief to councillors to be increased.	JB/KW