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**MINUTES OF THE ZOOM MEMBERS' MEETING ON WEDNESDAY 19 MAY 2021**

**ATTENDEES**

Aldermen

Frazer Agnew MBE  
Alan McDowell  
Stephen Moutray  
Derek Hussey  
Michael Henderson MBE

Angus Carson  
Robert Gibson  
Tommy Sandford  
Keith Kerrigan

Bill Keery MBE  
Jim Speers  
Allan Bresland  
Amanda Grehan

Councillors

Alison Bennington  
Joe Boyle  
Errol Thompson  
Timothy Gaston  
Christine McFlynn  
Robert Burgess

Vera McWilliam  
Dermot Nicholl  
Victor Warrington  
John McDermott  
Niamh Doris  
Charlie Casey

Billy Webb MBE  
Dan Kelly  
Beth Adger MBE  
Rodney Quigley  
Terry Andrews

Kate Wilson (Admin Assistant)

**APOLOGIES**

Aldermen

Maurice Devenney

Tommy Nicholl MBE

Councillors

Paul Hamill  
Eóin Tennyson  
Martin Reilly  
Peter Johnston  
Valerie Harte

Darryn Causby  
Tracy Kelly  
Diana Armstrong  
Hazel Legge

Liam Mackle  
Dale Pankhurst  
John Coyle  
Dermot Curran

1. Chairman's Welcome and Apologies

The NAC Chair, Ald Sandford welcomed everyone and asked if there were any apologies. Apologies received by email and mentioned today are as listed above.

2. Minutes of last Meeting

The minutes of the last Members' Meeting which took place on 24 March 2021 were agreed by all, as proposed by Cllr Burgess, and seconded by Ald Henderson. There were no matters arising from the minutes.

3. Reports from officers

Treasurer's Report

The Treasurer, Ald Carson, welcomed everyone and stated the balance in the current account. He asked Kate to give an update on which Councils have paid their annual subscription fee and following this asked if anyone present could chase up those not yet paid. This was agreed and the report accepted as proposed by Cllr Thompson and seconded by Cllr Adger.

Secretary's Report

Cllr Boyle, the Secretary welcomed everyone and thanked them for tuning in to this bi-monthly meeting. He then delivered his report as follows:

**Meetings/Updates**

Since our last Members' Meeting held by Zoom in March, the NAC Executive Committee held their April and May meetings, also by Zoom. We also had a Special Executive Committee Meeting in relation to our campaign for Councillor Equality on 26 April, I will cover this later in my report.

**Partnership Panel**

I received an invite and attended the DfC Partnership Panel meeting on 21 April 2021 by Zoom. At this meeting, the Mid Ulster Council proposal on extended leave for Councillors, which has the support of the NAC, was discussed.

The meeting was interesting, and I am hopeful that the Observer role will turn into a participant role as we have requested. I will keep you updated on this.

*Cllr Boyle explained the background to this and expressed his gratitude to NILGA, who participate on the panel, for their support of the NAC.*

**NIPSO Correspondence to Councillors in relation to Code of Conduct**

On 3 May I sent a follow-up to my letter of 2 February 2021 in which I had requested that correspondence in relation to the Code of Conduct should be sent to Councillors by post rather than encrypted email, this was as agreed by the Executive Committee.

Ms McAleer replied to me explaining that as their staff are currently working remotely, they will continue to use email for communications, however she will consider our proposal for postal correspondence when the LGES team returns to the office to work.

**NAC AGM 2021**

This will take place on **Friday 15<sup>th</sup> October 2021** at the Glenavon House Hotel in Cookstown. The event will run from 10am to 2pm to include pre-meeting refreshments with networking and a post-meeting lunch for all attendees. We are currently planning the event timetable but please save the date and further details, when confirmed, will be sent to you.

*Cllr Boyle explained the choice of venue was due to its central location and giving good value whilst looking after us well. He advised that prices had been sought from other venues.*

**Renunciation of Councillors Basic Allowance increase & reduction of higher tier Mileage Allowance**

At our last Members' Meeting there was discussion around the proposal at one Council, for the basic allowance increase to all their Councillors to be renounced.

On this matter, I initially wrote to Jeff Glass and Ian Lewis at DfC at the end of February and following that there was an exchange of letters and emails which concluded in a final reply from Ian Lewis on 26 March confirming, as I thought, that Councils can reduce the amount paid to their Councillors, as has now happened at one Council.

At the end of April there was a proposal on the table again at that Council to cut the Mileage Allowance rate for their Councillors to 45p per mile maximum and the Council voted for this reduction. *Further details in relation to the above were outlined by Cllr Boyle.*

*...continued*

**Continued - Renunciation of Councillors Basic Allowance increase & reduction of higher tier Mileage Allowance**

This matter was discussed by the NAC Executive Committee at a Special Meeting and it was agreed that these actions conflict with the NAC's Councillor Equality campaign which is to try to get a fair deal for all Councillors.

*Cllr Boyle then explained that the NAC's aims, and objectives are based on Councillors acting collectively to support each other on matters of common interest, which should be beneficial for all. He said that the NAC Executive Committee are acting on issues that have been brought to us by Members and are following their guidance on how they would like us to address these matters on their behalf. He reiterated the importance of everyone being on board with this, stating that no Members have approached him to say they do not agree with what we are doing.*

*Cllr Boyle's update on the campaign:*

**Councillor Equality**

We have been actively working on this campaign for almost four years now but there have been various circumstances that have caused delays, such as the lack of a working Local Assembly; the Local Elections in 2019; and the DfC's Ministers absence through ill health. However, a Proposal prepared by the NAC Executive Committee was presented to the DfC Officials and sent to the NI Assembly Committee for Communities in February/early March and we are waiting for their respective responses.

Following our Executive Committee Special Meeting we requested an Urgent Meeting with Minister Hargey MLA to discuss:

1. A change within the Consolidated Councillor Allowances legislation to prohibit Councils and/or Councillors from reducing the Basic Allowance or Expenses/Mileage amounts that are determined by the Department for Communities
2. An Independent Review of all aspects concerning the role of a Councillor now, as it was agreed that this would be carried out at the end of the first term of office

This meeting has been confirmed to take place by Zoom on Tuesday 1 June.

*Cllr Boyle said that this is good news, and that he has advised the Executive Committee and will work with them on preparing for this meeting. His then finished his report saying:*

The NAC aims to look after Councillors the best that we can, and the Executive Committee would like to get more Members involved to strengthen our voice on this...and other matters that are important to us. Therefore, we ask you, our Members' Delegates, how we can gain support for the NAC and how we should go about getting everyone on-board with our objectives on Councillor Equality? For example, if there are any Members that know of someone on their Council who is not a supporter of the NAC then maybe they could let me know and I will be happy to talk to them. We send regular Newsletters on our activities, and everyone should be aware of what we are working to achieve but I am always open to advice and guidance and would appreciate your comments and feedback on this.

Cllr Boyle ended his report stating that he is looking forward to the NAC AGM when Members can get together face to face once again.

Cllr Boyle was thanked for providing a detailed report and asked to provide further details on the Council action that has reduced Councillors' Allowances and how a Council can overturn the Departmental directive on Allowances.

In response Cllr Boyle provided further details on how the Councillor Allowances and Mileage reduction had been discussed by several Councils but was voted down in all but one. He added that the Departmental directive is based on maximum amounts to be paid but this can be reduced at Council. He said that this matter will be raised with the DfC Minister at our meeting and a request made that Councils or Councillors should not be allowed to change this.

There was further discussion on this matter, and questions and points were put forward by various members, these are summarised below:

- Can SRA payments be re-allocated within Councils if agreed by Members? – *To be checked and raised with the DfC Minister at our upcoming meeting.*
- Is there a Redundancy package or Severance Scheme in place for long serving Councillors that step down? – *No, there was a One-Of Severance offered when the Super Councils were formed for those who did not wish to carry on but there is nothing now in place. This is included in our request for an Independent Review of all aspects of the Councillor role.*
- Legislation on Allowances states the "Maximum" amounts that can be paid allowing this to be varied, this needs to be changed as it means that there are vast variances between Councils in terms with what is being paid to Councillors for Allowances including the Special Responsibility Allowances (SRA). The Council that is paying reduced Allowances and Mileage also returns approximately 50% of its SRA allocation each year. It was also suggested that Council Officers mileage should be cut, but this has not happened. *To be raised with the DfC Minister.*
- The Pension Scheme in place for Councillors only started in 2011 therefore Councillors in office before this date have no contributions in place for all their prior years of service which should be addressed. *To be raised with the DfC Minister.*
- Some work and discussion should be done at Party Political level provincially to gain further support for the NAC and its aims. It is disappointing that the actions of just a few are setting this organisation back in its endeavours to get a fair deal for all Councillors.
- People do not join Local Government for the money, we joined to serve the public but if you have given up most of your life to this service you deserve recognition in the form of a Severance Scheme. *Agreed, the NAC have an Awards Scheme to honour our Long Serving Councillors.*
- Councillors from the Council that has reduced the Mileage Allowance are travelling to meetings with Outside Bodies that a Council Officer also travels to; the Officer is entitled to 20p more per mile than the Councillors, so surely there is an equality issue in this and perhaps it should be raised with the Equality Commission. The person who put this forward at Council does not travel to any meetings with Outside Bodies and sometimes does not even attend Council Meetings. *We will try to get the best deal possible for those within all Councils.*

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## NAC MEMBERS' MEETING MINUTES - WEDNESDAY 19 MAY 2021 BY ZOOM

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- The Severance Scheme in place for the South of Ireland Councillors is very generous and a similar type of Scheme would be welcomed for us. *Yes, in the South if you lose your seat, you are justly recompensed. Our counterparts in the South get a higher Basic Allowance and significant Severance Pay – even if they have only served for one term of office.*
- Is the recently reviewed Allowance awarded to Councillors in the South paid from Central or Local Government? *The Local Authority pay the Allowances but in terms of their recent increase as it is mid-stream and has not been budgeted for it will be met by Local Government in the interim until the new rate-setting exercise takes place. Negative publicity in relation to their new Allowance award was short lived and quickly forgotten.*

Cllr Boyle thanked everyone for their input and said that he will meet with the EC team to get a plan in place for our meeting with the DfC Minister, so that we can prioritise the points we need to put across.

A member put forward that the Minister may not want to get involved with a decision taken at Council and asked if it was less than six months ago that the motion to reduce Allowances and Mileage rates had been made. When this was confirmed, he asked if any assistance can be provided on this matter, suggesting the NAC make a presentation to the members of the Council in question, or by our members speaking to their Political Parties within that Council, with a view to getting a motion in place to turn around the decision to reduce Allowances and Mileage. This could be justified by explaining the benefits to Council for attendance at Outside Body Meetings and Events.

Cllr Boyle provided further details on the background and how the decision may have been overturned if there had been more time to work on it before it was brought forward. He agreed the member's suggestion is a good idea saying that he will start by engaging with the Parties within that Council with a view to getting a new motion in place, perhaps for a few months down the line and following our meeting with the DfC Minister.

The Chair thanked Cllr Boyle for answering all the questions put to him today. The Secretary's Report was approved as proposed by Ald Speers and seconded by Cllr Thompson.

The Chair went on to say that the NAC do their best for all Councillors, and he praised the Secretary, the NAC Executive Committee, and Kate for all their hard work and said that he is looking forward to the meeting with Minister Hargey.

#### 4. AOB

It was stated by a member that the next Members' Meeting may be in person rather than virtual. Cllr Boyle said that we will keep members informed when arrangements are in place.

A suggestion was put forward for a NILGOSC presentation for one of our future Members' Meetings as things have changed since they last presented to us.

Cllr Boyle asked the Executive Committee to keep an eye on their emails as he will be in contact in relation to the meeting with the DfC Minister on 1 June 2021.

5. Next Meeting Date - Wednesday 21 July 2021, the format/venue is to be confirmed and we will circulate the details when arranged.

The Meeting ended, see over for decisions taken.

<b>Decisions taken and Action required</b>	<b>By</b>
Check if the SRA Allowances can be re-allocated within a Council	JB
Liaise with the Executive Committee to prepare for the meeting with DfC Minister Hargey on Tuesday 1 June 2021	JB
Consider holding the next Members' Meeting at a venue	EC
Check with NILGOSC if they can make a presentation at a future Members' Meeting	KW