



**MINUTES OF MEMBERS' MEETING ON WEDNESDAY 25 MAY 2022 HELD AT THE
CLAYTON HOTEL, BELFAST & BY ZOOM**

ATTENDEES

Aldermen

Frazer Agnew
Bill Keery
Jim Rodgers

David Drysdale
Alan McDowell
Tommy Sandford

Amanda Grehan
Tommy Nicholl

Councillors

Beth Adger
Joe Boyle
Dermot Curran
Jim Speers

Terry Andrews
Robert Burgess
Valerie Harte
Billy Webb

Alison Bennington
Charlie Casey
Hazel Legge

Kate Wilson (Admin Assistant)

ZOOM ATTENDEES

Aldermen

Angus Carson
Stephen Martin

Michael Henderson

Derek Hussey

Councillors

Diana Armstrong

Vera McWilliam

Victor Warrington

APOLOGIES

Councillors

Jonathan Craig
Peter Johnston
Dermot Nicholl

Niamh Doris
Tracy Kelly
Dale Pankhurst

Conor Heaney
JJ Magee
Michael Ruane

1. Chairman's Welcome & Apologies

The NAC Chair, Cllr Andrews opened the meeting asking for a minute's silence to be observed in respect of recent bereavements of Councillors family members and for Alderman Jimmy Menagh, from Ards & North Down, who sadly passed away on 1 May 2022.

Cllr Andrews then welcomed members to the meeting and expressed congratulations on behalf of the NAC to all fellow-Councillors that had recently been elected as MLAs in the Local Assembly Elections and wished them well in their new positions.

He explained the format for today's meeting based on the technology in use, saying that this has been arranged to give the best meeting experience to those joining by Zoom, whereby they should be able to see and hear all contributions to discussions that take place within the meeting room as well as contributions from the on-line attendees.

Cllr Andrews summed up his opening comments by saying that this will be the last month of Cllr Burgess's term as NILGA President and he congratulated him on behalf of the NAC for the excellent job he has done, stating that he has been a brilliant ambassador for NILGA.

He congratulated Cllr Martin Kearney on his upcoming appointment as the new NILGA President and wished him all the best in the role.

Cllr Casey said he concurred with the comments in relation to the NILGA President and this was agreed by all.

Apologies that have been received by email, marked in the Attendance Book, and informed today are noted on Page 1 of this document.

2. Minutes of last Meeting

The minutes of the last Members' Meeting which took place on 16 March 2022 were unanimously agreed, as proposed by Cllr Burgess, and seconded by Cllr Adger.

A query was raised in relation to the status of annual subscription payments, it was suggested that the Treasurer, Ald Carson could reply to this, and a summary of his response is detailed below under Treasurers report.

In relation to Councils whose payments are outstanding, it was agreed that these should be followed up on by the NAC and by Members on behalf of the NAC. This item will be revisited at the next EC meeting in June.

3. Officers Reports – Treasurer, Secretary and National Chair

Treasurer's Report

Ald Carson advised that the following Councils have paid their Annual Subscriptions:

Ards & North Down; Armagh, Banbridge & Craigavon; Belfast City; Causeway Coast & Glens; Derry & Strabane; Fermanagh & Omagh; Lisburn & Castlereagh and Mid Ulster.

He said, "it is nice to be with you all this morning, although not in person" and advised the balance in the Current Account.

The Treasurer's report was approved as proposed by Ald Sandford and seconded by Ald Keery

Secretary's Report

Cllr Boyle said "Good Morning and Welcome to all present and on Zoom"

Bereavements

As already touched upon by the Chair, since last Members Meeting, we learnt of the following deaths:

Cllr Sian Mulholland's father, Shane O'Neill on 4 March 2022

Ald Angus Carson's brother, Tony on 14 March 2022

Cllr Michael Long's father, Professor Adrian Long on 23 April 2022

Ald Jimmy Menagh, from Ards & North Down, on 1 May 2022

Mass or Sympathy cards were sent on behalf of the NAC to the families of the bereaved and we are currently assisting with some through the NILGOSC process, as that's what we are here to do to help families and colleagues in need.

AILG/LAMA Conference

As requested at the last Members' Meeting an email was sent to all NAC Members with the details of the AILG Spring Conference which took place on 23 & 24 March in Buncrana, Donegal. Cllr Andrews, Cllr Burgess, and I attended this.

Cllr Andrews and I were then invited to the LAMA Conference which took place in Kilkenny on Tuesday 12 April 2022. For this conference and the AILG one in Donegal we received relatively short notice, but at both events there was a very warm welcome was given to the NAC Officers present with the general theme of building stronger relationships between our organisations – one being the equivalent ourselves and the other of NILGA, and we do have a lot in common and can benefit and gain experience from cross-border meetings with us going down or them coming up. Particularly with the AILG in relation to the journey they have been on in gaining better terms and conditions for their Councillors.

NILGOSC Pension

As requested at the last Members' Meeting, we contacted NILGOSC to request that annual benefit statements continue to be posted out to members that do not use the on-line pension account system. Details of the reply that we received from NILGOSC was circulated by email to all NAC Members on 6 April, and this said that all councillors should still be receiving statements by post unless they have requested not to.

NAC NI Newsletter

This was circulated to all members on 4 April 2022, and as well as an update on the NAC NI Region's activities, it contained information and contact details for NILGOSC the Local Government Pension Scheme providers.

Members Meeting Venues

Belfast City Council were unable to host our meeting today therefore this venue was arranged as we had agreed that we would continue to hold meetings within each Council area on a rotational basis but if a Council was unable to host us, we would take a venue within that Council area.

I would like to place on record my thanks to Ald Tommy Sandford for his assistance with going back and forward to his Council in relation to securing a venue, but Belfast City Council are not hosting outside body meetings currently. Therefore, we are at The Clayton Hotel today and as usual we contacted various venues within the area and this one was the most competitive.

However, councils have agreed to host the rest of our Members Meetings for 2022 and these will take place as follows: Causeway Coast & Glens in July, Derry City & Strabane in September, and Fermanagh & Omagh in November.

The NI AGM will take place in October in the Glenavon House Hotel, this is a central location and they have been very good with us in the past also the cost is the same apart from a £1 increase for the lunch, which is very competitive.

Dates and details for all meetings are on the Meetings Page of our website and will be circulated to NAC Delegates in advance.

NAC National Meetings and Conferences

Members that attended the February Conference which took place in Glasgow had requested a copy of the presentation on Community Empowerment. This has now been received from the General Secretary, Cllr Brian Nelson and it has been forwarded to those that requested it. We will include details and a link to the presentation in our next Newsletter which is sent by email to all members. If you would like to view it prior to this, it can be accessed or downloaded from the Information Page on the NAC NI website

During April there was a National Conference held in Scarborough and a National Executive meeting will take place in South Shields on 30 May 2022.

Further national events are scheduled as follows: June in Southport, September in Nottingham, and November in Derby.

The dates are on the Meetings Page of our website and further details, when received, will be circulated to councils and all NAC members.

Councillor Equality Meetings

This is the biggest topic that as an organisation we are on a journey with, and it is promising that it is continuing to move forward. Following our letter to Minister Hargey on 14 March, a Draft Terms of Reference (TOR) for a Review of the Roles and Responsibilities of Councillors was received from the DfC. The NAC EC wrote to Minister Hargey thanking her for arranging this and Cllr Andrews and I also spoke to the Minister in relation to this when we saw her at the Local Assembly Election count, she was and continues to be very responsive to us as an organisation. After we had congratulated her on her success at the election, we took the opportunity to bring our case to her once again and she said that she was quite keen for this to move forward and keen for her officials to continue to work with us. I would like to put on the record our thanks to Minister Hargey on her support.

Whilst this is positive there is still a degree of uncertainty due to the current situation of our local assembly, whilst Minister Hargey will remain in place as a 'Caretaker' Minister we don't know what may happen in the future as this is a matter for devolved government.

The Draft TOR has been approved by the NAC EC with a request for additional items to be included, and the NAC EC have also asked for a meeting with Minister Hargey.

NILGA

We always had a relationship which had been developed over recent years with NILGA with Derek McCallan at the helm. Although the NAC have their own identity and primarily work with and for Councillors, whereby NILGA works with Councils, it makes good sense to work together on certain issues as we have Councillors that sit on both committees and there is an overlap of events and activities. To build on this relationship, Cllr Andrews and I organised and attended a meeting with the new NILGA CE, Alison Allen on Tuesday 29 March 2022. Although Alison was only nine weeks into the position at that stage, she found the time to meet with us and at that meeting Alison said that she is very keen to continue working with the NAC and to improve the relationship and build the bond between our organisations. NILGA are also supportive of our Councillor Equality Campaign that we are currently working with Minister Hargey on.

NAC NI Constitution Review

We had a Constitution in place that had served the organisation very well for many years as next year will be the 30th anniversary of the NAC in NI. However, it was agreed that it is time for the Constitution to be updated in relation to changes that have occurred over the years.

A sub-committee led by Cllr Webb has prepared a Draft Document and the EC are working through this. At a meeting on 4 April 2022 agreed changes were made to the Draft but to time constraints this work was not completed, and it was agreed that legal opinion will have to be sought prior to completion.

This process was side-lined slightly by the elections and keeping the Councillor Equality agenda moving, however with the elections out of the way, a further meeting is to be arranged to continue with this process.

When completed the Draft Constitution will be brought to the Members for approval as this is how we operate.

We always have on-going issues that are discussed by the EC however there is no point in bringing these to members until they have been discussed and agreed by the EC and then they are always brought forward and tabled at the next Members Meeting for their approval and this is how we have always operated.

End of Secretary's Report

Cllr Andrews thanked Cllr Boyle for a very comprehensive and packed report and for the updates on what's going on within the organisation in relation to the TOR for Councillor Equality, the Constitution and our relationships with AILG, LAMA and our counterparts in England, Scotland and Wales. He then asked for comments or questions from members.

In the discussion that followed messages of support for the NAC were voiced by many and points of view and information was provided by members in relation to the variations in amounts that are paid for Councillors Allowances across the NI Councils. It was reported that in one case a reduction of Mileage Allowance has been imposed on Councillors which has resulted in staff officers on that Council being able to claim higher mileage allowances than Councillors can for attending the same meetings. It was stated that many Councillors work full-time with no other source of income therefore any imposed reduction can cause hardship to those who are inputting more time to the role. It was also suggested that any negative issues about the NAC and the work they are carrying out should be debated within party groups so that problems can be addressed and resolved by fellow Councillors.

During this discussion there was unanimous agreement that Councillors across NI should be treated equally for the role they carry out, irrespective of the party they represent or the Council area that they serve, and that Councillors should be working together to achieve equality for all and be supportive of the actions that the NAC take on behalf of its members.

Cllr Boyle responded to these comments saying that the NAC already has the agreement and support from the government spokesperson for each of the main political parties to pursue a review of the Councillor role and all Councillors should be made aware of this. Therefore, a letter is being prepared to send to all Councillors with an update and to provide details of the work that has and is being carried out by the NAC on their behalf in relation to Councillor Equality and to ask for the support of all members.

Ald Henderson put forward a proposal that this letter should also be sent to Chief Executives at each Council and when this letter is received that Councillors should propose welcoming the letter and requesting that a letter of support to be sent to the NAC. This was seconded by Ald Drysdale and agreed by all.

Cllr Andrews thanked everyone for their input and said the NAC will continue to work on behalf of all members. He handed over to Cllr Casey for the National Chair's report.

National Chair's Report

Cllr Casey said that there isn't anything to report at the moment, but an NI Delegation will be going across to England for the next National Executive Meeting which is coming up on 4 June and an update will be provided following that.

4. Any Other Business

A member made a point in relation to ARC21, and Ministerial decisions that were taken in connection to a Residual Waste Centre which went against advice given to two Ministers by staff and departmental officers. This resulted in court cases involving high costs of public money and if this was done by a Councillor for example in planning, they would be penalised but that didn't happen in this instance which displays inequality.

5. Next Meeting Date

Our next Members Meeting will take place at 11am on Wednesday 20 July 2022 at Causeway Coast & Glens Civic Headquarters, Cloonavin, Portstewart Road, Coleraine.

The meeting ended, see below for Decisions taken.

Decisions/Actions Summary	By
Members from Councils that have not yet paid their NAC Annual Subscription should follow-up on this if possible. The NAC Office will also follow-up and discuss this at the next EC meeting.	Members KW
A letter is to be sent to all Councillors with an update and to provide details of the work that has and is being carried out by the NAC on their behalf in relation to Councillor Equality, this is to be copied in to Council CE's.	JB/KW
Members to welcome the above letter at Council and propose that a letter of support is sent from their Councils to the NAC in response.	Members