



## **Activities Update**

### ***Councillor Equality***

Since our last Members' Meeting in March, the NAC Executive Committee (EC) have had three meetings by Zoom. As well as the usual monthly meetings there was an additional meeting held on 26 April to discuss Councillor Equality.

It is the NAC's understanding that a review of the Councillor role was to be carried out at the end of the first term of office following the implementation of the RPA that reduced NI Councils from 26 to 11 in 2015.

The NAC are working to progress this and to address concerns raised by our members in relation to carrying out their role, and our officers have met with the major political parties to bring this to their attention. Progress has been delayed by circumstances such as - the suspension of the Local Assembly; the local elections in 2019; the COVID pandemic and the Department for Communities (DfC) Minister's absence through ill health last year. However, a Proposal prepared by the NAC EC, on behalf of the NAC Members, was presented to Officials from the DfC in February and sent to the NI Assembly Committee for Communities in early March, we are waiting for their respective responses. Following their Special Meeting in April the NAC EC now have a meeting arranged with Minister Hargey MLA, on 1<sup>st</sup> June 2021 to discuss the above matters.

### ***NIPSO Office Correspondence***

Following our request for correspondence on the Code of Conduct to be sent to Councillors by post rather than encrypted email, the Ombudsman's office has replied saying that as their staff are currently working remotely, they will continue to use email for communications, however, they will consider our proposal for postal correspondence when the LGES team returns to the office to work.

### ***Local Government Partnership Panel***

Following a request made to the Department for Communities (DfC) the NAC Regional Secretary, Cllr Joe Boyle was invited to the 21 April Partnership Panel Meeting. Cllr Boyle attended the Zoom meeting as an Observer representing the NAC.

Cllr Boyle found the meeting to be very interesting and is hopeful that a request made for the NAC to participate at meetings will be approved.

For further details on the Partnership Panel and links to relevant papers please see the information that is available on the NILGA website by [clicking here>>](#)

***NAC AGM 2021  
FRIDAY 15 OCTOBER  
2021***



***We are delighted to announce that the NAC Annual General Meeting for 2021 will take place at the Glenavon House Hotel, Cookstown on Friday 15 October 2021.***

This event will run from approximately 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. Further details, when confirmed, will be published on the [NAC Website](#) and invites will be sent to all NAC Members' Delegates.



## Handling Online Abuse

Intimidation and abuse directed at Councillors, mainly through Social Media, is a matter of concern for the NAC Members and at the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, on-line attacks aimed at Councillors appeared to increase, primarily in relation to the provision of Council Services. At that time this was discussed at our Members' Meetings and the NAC Secretary, Cllr Joe Boyle wrote to all Councillors across our region asking for their views on this issue, and to determine if they and/or any of their colleagues have been affected by Social Media abuse and if so, how they coped with it. The NAC recognise that this is a growing concern which many of our Members have been affected by or are aware of others who have had to deal with this. Some of the comments made by our Members were:

- *There can be abuse relating to incidents that happened several years ago.*
- *Untrue allegations made can be published by the media.*
- *Misleading newspaper articles can also appear on search engines such as Google.*
- *Controllers of Social Media should be acting on this.*
- *Councillors are sometimes targeted in relation to grievances with MPs and MLAs.*
- *Problems can be encountered whilst canvassing.*

Therefore, the NAC welcome the programme of work entitled 'Civility in Public Life' which is being carried out by the Local Government Association in co-ordination with WLGA, COSLA and NILGA.

Further details of this programme with advice and tips for elected representatives can be viewed on the LGA website by clicking the image below or visiting:

<https://www.local.gov.uk/our-support/guidance-and-resources/civility-public-life>

Rules of engagement

## Handling online abuse

**Set expectations** – point people to your rules of engagement and apply these consistently.

**Lead by example** – do not post comments that could be considered abusive, and avoid posting false or unverified information.

**Consider content** – some content will be more controversial than others. Consider before posting how you will manage engagement with this, for example only engaging in comments on the policy itself or directing people to consultation documents.

**Defuse conflict** – waiting to respond can take the heat out of situations, as can reframing your own language.

**Know when to step back** – Remember you do not have to engage with abusive or threatening behaviour. You can set the record straight with factual information if you wish, but you can step away when you want to.

**Protect your privacy** – set different passwords for different accounts, and do not post information that can allow people to identify your whereabouts outside of official council business.

**Understand privacy settings** – there is a range of settings to help you manage who can see or comment on your posts.

**Get and give support** – where you feel able, provide support to fellow councillors online, and reach out to colleagues and your council for support where needed.

**Record abuse** – screenshot comments and keep a record of abusive or threatening communications.

**Report serious issues** – if you feel unable to deal with online abuse yourself or have any concerns about your safety, report this to your council or the police.



For more information on the LGA's work on handling abuse on social media and digital citizenship visit: [www.local.gov.uk/civility-public-life](https://www.local.gov.uk/civility-public-life)

REF 43.5



## Useful Links



[Councillors Allowances from April 2020 – Updated March 2021](#)

[HMRC Tax Guidance for Councillors](#)

[NILGA Councillors' Guide](#)

[Councillors' Code of Conduct](#)

[Guidance on Code of Conduct](#)

## Coronavirus Information

There are various sources of information and advice available in relation to COVID-19 and we have added some useful website links below that can be accessed by clicking on the logos or copying the links below into your web browser.



<https://www.health-ni.gov.uk/news/are-you-eligible-vaccine-northern-ireland-check-you-book>



<https://www.adviceni.net/coronavirus>



<https://www.nibusinessinfo.co.uk/campaign/coronavirus-updates-support-your-business>



<https://www.nidirect.gov.uk/campaigns/coronavirus-covid-19>



<https://www.health-ni.gov.uk/>