



National Association of Councillors Northern Ireland Region Members' Newsletter October 2020



The Annual General Meeting of the National Association of Councillors took place on Friday 2 October 2020 at the Glenavon House Hotel in Cookstown. Our members were reassured by the Covid-19 guidelines provided to them prior to the meeting and by the safety measures that were in place at the hotel on the day.

In line with the Coronavirus restrictions this year, the NAC Executive Committee decided not to invite guests from outside of the region, which included our colleagues from the NAC UK and representatives from our counterpart organisations in Southern Ireland, the AILG (Association of Irish Local Government) and LAMA (Local Authority Members Association). However, we have continued to keep in touch with officers from all these organisations over recent months and we will carry on with building upon the strong relationships that we have formed. It is also our intention to meet with these organisations as soon as possible and current discussions are taking place involving guidelines in both jurisdictions.

We did, however, have guests in attendance from the Northern Ireland Local Government Association (NILGA) of whom we work with periodically on issues and concerns of mutual benefit and it was a pleasure to welcome Mr Derek McCallan, the NILGA Chief Executive, Cllr Frances Burton, NILGA Office Bearer and Elected Member Development Chair and Ms Fiona Douglas, NILGA Regional Development Manager.



NAC Secretary & Chair Cllr Joe Boyle & Ald Tommy Sandford welcome the NILGA CE Mr Derek McCallan

Members that were unable to attend the 2020 AGM may be interested in seeing photos from this event and this year's programme which includes the 2019 AGM Meeting Minutes and Officers Reports. To view and/or download these items, please click the links below.

For the NAC 2020 AGM Programme, Meeting Minutes and Officers Reports from our 2019 AGM [Please Click here>>](#)

To see photos from this event [Please Click here>>](#)

Although some meetings were suspended during the year due to the Coronavirus, the NAC has continued to communicate, in writing with the relevant external bodies in relation to:

- Progressing the review of the Councillors' Code of Conduct
- Addressing matters that are affecting councillors' well-being and to strive for line-of-work equality
- To help ensure that councillors receive adequate and appropriate training

Despite responses being slowed down by the pandemic, we are making progress and will carry on this important work to, hopefully, achieve the best results on behalf of our members. Updates on these items are on page 3.



Message from the NAC Secretary, Cllr Joe Boyle

At the NAC AGM, Cllr Boyle gave the following address, which we would like to share with all our members:

“Whilst councils and many organisations in all communities contributed amazingly during the past number of months to assist in so many different ways, and in particular our NHS employees and carers who we all owe a tremendous debt of gratitude to and whom I thank for their great efforts, let it equally never be underestimated the contribution and significant role that our 462 councillors made with their tireless efforts, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week across every council and district electoral area.



We had, and continue to, deal with constituents on the everyday issues as well as those on the brink of poverty, employment concerns, mental health issues and families under extreme pressure, even to the extent of the potential break up of families – we’ve had to deal with everything that came our way.

The reality is that as councillors we are the first of our 3-tier elected representation that the public turn to for assistance. The public know their councillors and, in many, if not all cases they continued to represent their constituents whilst dealing with their own personal circumstances.

Unfortunately, we had cases during this pressure period whereby some of our elected colleagues were challenged with a noticeable increase of social media abuse, even to the extent of having prepared resignation letters to their respective councils. Thankfully, after several conversations I am happy to report that this thinking was not progressed and resignations did not take place – that is one of the reasons the NAC exists – to afford an outlet for our members to present their problems to, that is our role, that is what we do.

The abuse largely centred around many aspects of councils being unable to deliver normal services, either because of central government guidelines or, in some cases, for various reasons that some councils were operating with significantly less quota of staff. Even though the reasons were well documented and explained to the public, some, at times, simply didn’t want to accept this as being the case within the then current operations procedures in our councils.”

Please remember that if you have any problem or query relating to your work as a councillor, please do not hesitate to get in touch with us and we will do our best to assist.



Activities Update

Councillors' Code of Conduct review

This was raised at the meeting of the Partnership Panel on 16 September 2020 and Minister Carál Ní Chuilín agreed that she will take it forward.

Councillor Equality

We have met with representatives from all the main parties to gauge their support. We have also put forward requests to present details on this matter to the DfC Minister and the Committee for Communities at Parliament Buildings.

LG TG (Local Government Training Group) Consultation

During September Cllr Boyle and Ald Henderson have been taking part in this consultation on behalf of the NAC members, which relates to future councillor needs and training. The process is being run by iESE Ltd (local government and public sector consultants) and involved one-to-one interviews, coursework and a 3-hour workshop, the final stage of the consultation is due to be completed soon.

Consultation on the Staff Code of Conduct

Following a request from The Local Government Staff Commission for NI, the NAC Chair, Ald Sandford and Secretary, Cllr Boyle met with Ms Lorna Parsons in September to provide input, on behalf of the NAC, to the Consultation on the Staff Code of Conduct for Local Government Employees.

Ombudsman introductory meeting

Although Ms Kelly was unable to attend the NAC AGM, she thanked us for the invite and said that she would be keen to attend any other events that we wish to invite her to, where possible. She also suggested an introductory zoom call with the NAC Secretary in relation to the importance of a good working relationship.

NAC Executive Committee meetings

The Secretary, Cllr Boyle has sent thank you letters on behalf of the NAC committee to staff at Derry City & Strabane and Mid Ulster councils for facilitating their September and October meetings at the Guildhall and Dungannon Chambers. Our members were reassured by the measures that had been put in place to ensure social distancing and with the professionalism and helpfulness of the staff at both venues.

NAC NI Region Constitution review

A sub-committee, made up to include all party representation, has been formed to work on restructuring the NAC NI Region Constitution to bring it up to date.

NAC Officers 2020/21

At our recent AGM members for the Executive Committee were nominated and confirmed as follows:

Senior Vice Chair

Cllr Terry Andrews

Junior Vice Chair

Ald Alan McDowell

DUP Member

Cllr Beth Adger

UUP Member

Cllr Robert Burgess

APNI Member

Cllr Billy Webb

SDLP Member

Cllr Dermot Curran

SF Member

Cllr Charlie Casey

Women's Representative

Cllr Valerie Harte

The positions of Chair, Secretary and Treasurer are elected bi-annually therefore these remain as:-

Ald Tommy Sandford, **Chair**

Cllr Joe Boyle, **Secretary**

Ald Angus Carson, **Treasurer**

Next Members' Meeting

Our next Members' meeting is scheduled to take place at 11am on Wednesday 18 November 2020. We will try to arrange a venue for but if this is not possible the meeting will be carried out by Zoom.



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.



www.adviceni.net



<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/>

Avoid COVID-19 Scams

Beware of COVID-19 Online Scams and Threats



For helpful information from NI Direct Government Services and Google on how to avoid becoming a victim of online scams, please click the links below.

