



# WEST SUSSEX ASSOCIATION OF LOCAL COUNCILS LIMITED

## Minutes from the Board Meeting of West Sussex Association of Local Councils Limited held via a Zoom video/audio conference at 10am on Tuesday 28<sup>th</sup> July 2020

<b>Directors Present</b>	Cllr Terry Oliver	Horsham District Association and Chair
	Cllr Lilian Richardson	Arun District Association
	Cllr Michael Warden	Arun District Association
	Cllr Tony Nicklen	Adur District Association
	Cllr Mike Beal	Chichester District Association
	Cllr David Ribbens	Chichester District Association
	Cllr Phil Baxter	Horsham District Association
	Cllr Rodney Jackson	Mid Sussex District Association
	Roger Taylor	Hedleys Solicitors LLP

<b>Presidents and Vice Presidents Present</b>	Michael Chater (President)
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<b>Also in attendance</b>	Emily King	WSCC acting Director of Communities
	Trevor Leggo	CEO SSALC
	Anne Bott	Deputy CEO SSALC
	Anna Beams	Office, Training & Events Manager SSALC
	Julie Holden	SLCC representative
	Alun Aylesbury	SDNPA representative
	Paul Richards	Clerk to the Boards SSALC

- 1. Apologies for absence.**  
Apologies were received and accepted from Mandy Jameson (PCC's Office), Mark Mulberry (Company Secretary) and Helen Rice (Age UK).
- 2. To approve the minutes of meeting held on 28th May 2020.**  
The minutes were approved as a true record of the meeting and were signed by the Chairman.
- 3. Matters Arising (not on this Agenda) and update on actions from the last meeting.**  
None.
- 4. Presentation from Emily King, WSCC acting Director of Communities.**  
The Chairman introduced the new acting new Director of Communities and thanked her for attending. Emily King advised that she had worked for the County Council for over 20 years and was very pleased to be appointed to her new role. Her desire was to work closely with WSALC, and she described her current portfolio that included responsibilities for Library, Registrar, Records, Coroner, Community Development & Safety, Travellers and Customer Services (including the contact centre). She described her current activities that included: -
  - A focus on improving external and internal communications between WSCC staff and their partners;
  - Leading on the Covid-19 shielding response, setting up community hubs and establishing the Test and Trace protocols;

- Launching the 'Reset and Reboot' programme to reset service delivery across the County Council and address future challenges; and
- Climate change initiatives;

Cllr Jackson asked if WSCC had sufficient resources to manage the proposed Test and Trace procedures. Emily advised that, with support from Public Health England, they have enough resources. Staff were being re-tasked to assist and that social media targeting would help in reaching a wider audience.

Cllr Nicklen suggested that local community groups had provided an invaluable service to residents during the current Covid-19 crisis. He asked how WSCC propose to work with them and how they will address the publicised budget shortfall. Emily described a broad partner landscape (that included District and Borough Councils) delivering joined-up services to the most vulnerable in the community via a hub network. A picture of vulnerability was emerging with over 35,000 residents shielded during the crisis. However only 6% of those requiring services were known to the care and social service teams at WSCC. Sue Furlong would continue to be the focal point for liaising and communicating with local councils.

The Chairman thanked Emily for her comprehensive presentation and welcomed the opportunity to work with her and her team. Board Members recognised, in particular, the excellent communication and involvement of Sue Furlong with West Sussex local councils. The Chairman also stressed the important role of the Sussex Local Resilience forum and that their valuable work be more widely publicised. He asked that Emily attend a Covid-19 focussed Board meeting in the future that the CEO would organise.

**ACTION** – the CEO to organise a Covid-19 focussed Board meeting and invite relevant partners including Emily King

The Chairman requested that Alun Aylesbury (SDNPA) and Julie Holden (SLCC) update the Board on recent activities for their organisations.

**South Downs National Park Authority** – Alun Aylesbury updated the Board with the latest SDNPA appointments.

- Two West Sussex local council representatives were elected to the Board (Alun was re-elected together with Andrew Shackson);
- A former local council representative, Tim Burr was appointed to the Board by the Secretary of State;
- Ian Phillips has been appointed as Chair of the SDNPA replacing Margaret Paren; and
- Alun was re-appointed as Chair of the Planning Committee.

Alun advised that most SDNPA staff were working from home during the Covid-19 epidemic however social distancing rules had led to a reduction in planning site visits.

**Society of Local Council Clerks** – Julie Holden presented an update to the Board and thanked Anna Beams and the SSALC team for their invaluable Covid-19 updates which greatly assisted Clerks during the Covid-19 crisis. She advised that: -

- The introduction of virtual meetings has seen increased public participation e.g. via streamed meetings or YouTube videos;
- The SLCC conference will be a virtual one this year;
- Despite the Covid-19 lockdown rules, many local councils had completed their annual returns successfully;
- Concerns have been raised by local councils as some principal authorities have not shared Government public sector grants with them. In addition, the impact of Covid-19 may have a detrimental impact on the tax base formula leading to a potential reduction in precept calculations; and
- The Society has seen an increased number of Councillor Code of Conduct complaints relating to social media activity. The Mid Sussex Monitoring Officer has sent an email to their local councils reminding Councillors of their Code of Conduct responsibilities.

The Chairman thanked Alun and Julie for their presentations. He announced a change to the agenda running order.

**5. Parish & Town Council future.**

The CEO referred to the WSCC local support questionnaire, circulated previously to DALCs for comments. He reported on a good response back to WSCC.

**6. Policing.**

The CEO referred to the PCC's report, circulated previously, and reported on the latest round of community consultation. He announced that Jo Shiner had been appointed as the new Chief Constable and that she wished to continue the previous good relations with SALC. He advised that his normal face-to-face briefing with new PCSO recruits is being replaced temporarily with a recorded podcast due to Covid-19 restrictions.

Cllr Beal asked if the current policing model is publicised widely enough as residents may not be aware of the current operational priorities. The CEO agreed to raise this with Sussex Police.

Cllr Baxter reported on the Independent Advisory Group being established for Horsham, Adur and Worthing to assist the police in gauging public opinion, it was noted that a cross section of residents was being sought.

Cllr Ribbens asked why this initiative was not being rolled out in Chichester District and the CEO explained that it was linked to the District Command unit and a matter for the District Commander. The CEO agreed to raise the matter with Sussex Police.

<p><b>ACTION</b> – the CEO to raise the issue of improved public communication regarding the Sussex policing model with the PCC and Police.</p>
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**7. Covid-19 update.**

The CEO advised that: -

- the Sussex Local Resilience Forum is working on plans for a potential winter outbreak;
- NALC has published and showcased the good work undertaken by local councils during the crisis; several SSALC member councils are featured; and
- There is good evidence that local councils are working well with their community hubs however there is no comprehensive list of such activities for each County.

**8. Possible impact on local councils resulting from financial pressures on principal authorities.**

The CEO reported that several principal authorities are not releasing Government Covid-19 grants to local councils. He cited an example from Horsham DC where a request for additional funds due to increased costs to clean public toilets was refused. He reported that District and Borough councils across the county were experiencing financial difficulties with most suffering a cash shortfall due to loss of revenue and increased costs associated with Covid-19. He recommended that local councils start their budget process earlier than normal. The Chairman asked that this matter be re-addressed at the next Board meeting.

**9. Training**

The CEO advised that SSALC were offering both bespoke and generic training. Virtual training courses have been successfully received and included new Clerks, Chairman, Communications, Employment and Planning training. He reminded Board Members that they would be welcome to attend any of the relevant training courses

Anna Beams advised that the planning for the various annual conferences is on hold due to lockdown restrictions. She advised that a blended face-to-face and virtual programme of training courses could be cost effective and form part of any future offering. Anne Bott reported that her training sessions had been well received by participants but tried to ensure the sessions lasted no longer than 2 hours to avoid fatigue.

## 10. Reports by District Associations

- (a) **Adur** – no update
- (b) **Arun** – Cllr Richardson reported little activity in the Association due to Covid-19 but praised Arun DC's response to managing Government grants to small businesses. The key issue facing her Members is seen to be future resilience/emergency plans, the Devolution White Paper and lessons learned from the Covid-19 epidemic.
- (c) **Chichester** – Cllr Beal advised that his notes from the WSALC Board meetings have been circulated to ChiDALC. He hopes to hold an Association meeting very soon - via Zoom if necessary.
- (d) **Horsham** – Cllr Baxter advised that a well written newsletter from Horsham DC had been sent to residents. He advised that the HALC met last week where Terry Oliver was re-elected as Chairman and Cllr Baxter was re-elected as Vice-Chairman. The meeting received a timely presentation on resilience. He advised that the Horsham DC Standards Committee had met virtually and discussed the NALC draft Model Code of Conduct. He reported that this new draft had not been well received and feedback is that the current Horsham DC Code of Conduct was preferred. The Chairman advised that HALC have also agreed a new constitution.
- (e) **Mid Sussex** – Cllr Jackson reported that Cllr Steer remained Chairman and that the next Association meeting will be via Zoom. He advised that the Mid Sussex local councils have coped well during the Covid-19 crisis. A major issue for the District is the future 5-year land supply where it is estimated that 1,400 houses will need to be built every year.

## 11. Statutory Accounts Year Ended 31st March 2020.

The CEO presented the accounts for signature. The Chairman advised that he could not sign them as he had received the accounts only the day before and had had little time to examine them. Neither had he received the annual management accounts for period ended 31/03/2020 requested in an email, sent the previous week, in response to an email from the CEO. He also asked the Board to appoint an independent firm of Accountants (Williams & Co) to audit these accounts. The CEO advised that Board members had been sent the accounts by email on 3rd June 2020. Members variously stated that they had either had, or had not, received these accounts.

The Chairman proposed that the signing of the accounts be postponed (whilst reminding the Board that they would have to be dealt with within the statutory six-month period which would end on 30th September 2020) and raised again at the next meeting. Directors **AGREED** the proposal with one Member abstaining. The Chairman proposed that a budget of £500 be allocated from WSALC bank balances to fund the audit. Directors **AGREED** the proposal with one Member abstaining.

To ensure that all Board Members had the opportunity to scrutinise the accounts, as their fiduciary duties required, the Chairman proposed that the Management Accounts to year ending 31st March 2020 be sent or re-sent to Board Members. Directors **AGREED** the proposal with one Member abstaining.

## 12. Report on the clarification of relationship between WSALC and SSALC.

The CEO advised that he had circulated the report that the Board had requested and the Chairman thanked him for the report on behalf of the Board. The Chairman asked that a full time equivalent (FTE) value be attributed to the staffing numbers provided in the report and the CEO agreed to provide this. Cllr Baxter asked if the CEO could detail the costs as a 'per elector' value and the CEO agreed to provide this

The Chairman asked how the CEO had gathered the various CALC's data in his report. The CEO advised that the information was mostly available via annual reports – though not from all Counties, from public records; and from County Officer contacts. The Chairman considered that it would be helpful if the date periods could be provided against each CALC so as to compare like-with-like and the CEO agreed to provide this. Cllr Nicklen asked how many of the CALCs mentioned in the report were Incorporated. The CEO advised that to the best of his knowledge there were about half-a-dozen CALCs across England that had become incorporated.

The Chairman thanked the CEO for his report and asked that the updates and actions be circulated to the Board before its next meeting on 27th October 2020.

**ACTIONS – to be provided before the next Board meeting**

- the CEO to provide an FTE value to be attributed to the staffing numbers in his report;
- the CEO to provide a 'per elector' value against all cost and income headings on a pro-rata basis against the membership; and
- the CEO to provide a date period range value for each CALC.

**13. Commissioning of an independent report for Member Councils.**

Cllr Beal reported that the proposed 2020 Strategic Review was not moving forward due mainly to the resignation from the SSALC Board, of two of the three (then) Chairmen – those of ESALC and Surrey ALC. He suggested that a natural conclusion for the WSALC Board would be to have an independent analysis undertaken, as the Strategic Review had floundered. Cllr Nicklen asked whether there was knowledge of anyone having the necessary expertise to conduct this independent review and the Chairman advised that he had identified Professor Colin Copus, an experienced and acknowledged expert in this field. The Chairman advised that some Board Members had met Professor Copus and, subject to Members' approval, he would be recommending Professor Copus's appointment to undertake this task. Cllr Baxter suggested that such a review should be a routine matter because it was incumbent upon the Board, as representative of its Member Councils, to try to ensure value for money – and supported the proposal. Cllr Jackson considered that it was of concern that two ALC Chairman had resigned and noted that Directors did have both a responsibility to consider value for money and to ensure that SSALC is run responsibly, efficiently and effectively.

The Chairman proposed that the Board commission an independent review to identify options for WSALC to secure best value for the money that WSALC spends on the range of services currently being delivered to member councils by SSALC. Cllr Baxter supported this proposal which was seconded by Cllr Warden. Directors **AGREED** the proposal with one Member abstaining.

The Chairman proposed that Professor Colin Copus be appointed to undertake the review and prepare the report. Cllr Ribbens supported this proposal which was seconded by Cllr Richardson. Directors **AGREED** the proposal with one Member abstaining.

Cllr. Richardson proposed that the Board agree a working budget of £7,000 for preparation of the report, to include the necessary research and administrative support. This proposal was seconded by Cllr Ribbens. Directors **AGREED** the proposal with one Member abstaining. The CEO advised that he had met Professor Copus and would be happy to work with him. The CEO agreed to facilitate necessary payments via the WSALC Bank account.

The Chairman proposed that the report, having been submitted to the Board, be presented to Member councils at the next AGM/EGM with the Board's recommendations. Directors **AGREED** the proposal with one Member abstaining.

Following review of these proposals and discussion, Members recommended the appointment of an author, researcher and administrator to prepare and complete the report. The CEO asked the Board to clarify that any administrative and meeting support that would be required to service this activity would be outside, and would not involve, the SSALC Secretariat. The Board confirmed that this would be the case – that was the reason for including the funding of a researcher and an administrator to assist the report's author. Cllr Warden supported this proposal which was seconded by Cllr Ribbens. Directors **AGREED** the proposal with two Members abstaining. The Chairman suggested that the Board next meet on 20th August 2020 to review progress and this was **AGREED** by Directors.

The Chairman proposed that a standalone email domain web address be acquired so that email communication from and to the WSALC membership, about this project, could be sent without affecting the processes of SSALC. Cllr Warden supported this proposal which was seconded by Cllr Ribbens. Directors **AGREED** the proposal with one Member abstaining.

The Chairman proposed that appropriate delegation be given to certain members of the Board to implement the Board's instructions as per the Articles of Association. The Chairman, Vice Chairman and Cllr. Richardson were nominated and Directors **AGREED** the proposal with one Member abstaining.

The Chairman asked Mr Taylor for any observations. Mr Taylor stated that he was happy with the process as agreed by Directors but would not comment further at this stage. The Chairman also advised that he had raised this matter with the Chairmen of ESALC and Surrey ALC.

**14. Any other urgent matters to be raised by Board Members.**

The CEO advised that the recent Devolution White Paper may have a significant impact on SSALC members and that the Board may wish to meet before the next scheduled session to review.

**Next Meeting Dates**

- **20<sup>th</sup> August 2020 – to review progress on the Independent Review** - Directors only (no guests or SSALC officers)
- **27<sup>th</sup> October 2020 – Full Board meeting**

The meeting closed at 13:08

Signed (Chairman) \_\_\_\_\_

Dated \_\_\_\_\_