



West Sussex ALC Ltd.
Minutes of the Virtual Board Meeting of West Sussex ALC Ltd. Held
remotely by Zoom on
Friday 26th January 2024 at 2:30pm

Attendance

Cllr Douglas Denham St Pinnock, Chairman, Mid Sussex District Association
Cllr Alison Cooper, Arun District Association
Cllr Andrew Shaxson, Chichester District Association
Cllr Amanda Tait, Chichester District Association
Cllr Charles Britton, Chichester District Association
Cllr Val Court, Horsham District Association
Cllr Martin Sheldon, Mid Sussex District Association
Trevor Leggo, CEO WSALC Ltd.
Julie Holden, Clerk's Representative, Society of Local Council Clerks (Sussex Branch)
Mark Mulberry, Company Secretary
Alun Aylesbury, SDNPA representative
Anna Beams, Secretary to the Board

1. Welcome by Chair

The Chair welcomed all to the meeting. He expressed his sadness at the passing of Cllr Malcolm Eastwood on behalf of the Board and added that he was a great support to the Board and in particular to himself and Trevor Leggo. He advised that a memorial service will be held on 16th February at St. Peters Church, Henfield if anyone would like to attend.

The Chair proposed that a donation of £250 is made to St Barnabus Hospice in memory of Malcolm, the proposal was seconded by Cllr Amanda Tait.

It was AGREED to donate £250 to St Barnabus Hospice in memory of Cllr Malcolm Eastwood.

2. Apologies for absence

Received and accepted from Cllrs Michael Tu and Mike Mendoza and Sarah Norman, Clerk's representative.

3. Election of Vice-Chair

On a proposal by the Chair, Cllr Andrew Shaxson was **UNANIMOUSLY ELECTED** as Vice-Chair.

Cllr Shaxson thanked the Board for his appointment and added that he had agreed to stand as Vice-Chair to support the Chair in the smooth running of the association, however, should other Board Members wish to stand before the next annual meeting, he encouraged them to do so.

4. Previous Minutes

The Minutes were **APPROVED** as a true record to be issued to the Chair for electronic signing.

5. Financial Update

- a) **Management Accounts for Q3:** Mark Mulberry referred to the report circulated before the meeting ([appendix A](#)). He added that the association is in a good position to implement projects and does not foresee a requirement to increase subscription fees in the next financial year.

Following questions raised regarding large sums being held in the current account, it was AGREED to transfer £20,000 to the NatWest deposit account.

- b) **Discuss and agree options for alternative deposit accounts:** concerns were raised regarding large sums held in the WSALC NatWest bank account and lack of FSCS protection. The CEO advised that NALC have recently negotiated with the CCLA to pay the best rate of return on deposits and suggested opening a deposit account with the CCLA.

Following discussions, it was AGREED that a CCLA account is opened with a deposit of £75,000 with the remaining funds deposited across the current and deposit accounts in NatWest.

- c) **Discuss and agree options for advertising budget:** Mark Mulberry explained that, following funds being spent on a campaign to attract new councillors, a sum of money for advertising has since been allocated within the budget.

Following discussions, it was AGREED the budget was not required until the 2027 elections and the amount would be retained in general reserves.

6. CEO Update

The CEO referred to his written report ([appendix B](#)) and added the following comments:

Troubled Councils: The CEO proposed that, following several incidents of him being called to intervene at troubled councils, a task of two WSALC Board Members with officer support meet with the Chair of the council and others to offer advice and guidance to individual councils requesting support in such matters.

It was AGREED that support will be provided if necessary by the CEO and two WSALC Board Members who will be selected based on each individual case.

Julie Holden thanked WSALC for their support of Clerks. She explained that many clerks have difficulty accessing support and suggested that the focus should be on encouraging councils to adopt the Civility and Respect Pledge and that training in the subject could help them to understand the relevance and significance of the pledge. Julie agreed to assist WSALC in encouraging clerks to complete and return a recent survey circulated by WSALC which aims to understand how many councils have signed the pledge and if they have not signed it, to establish why.

The Chair proposed and it was AGREED that a joint communique is circulated to member councils advising them to readopt the Civility and Respect Pledge on an annual basis.

Communications Strategy: The CEO advised that he receives a newsletter from the Isle of Wight County Association and suggested issuing a WSALC newsletter based on their model which he would edit.

Julie Holden suggested including an article on clerks who have recently qualified in CiLCA and/or Community Governance and how it has helped their council.

It was AGREED to produce a pilot newsletter based on the Isle of Wight model.

On a proposal by the Vice-Chair, the Chair agreed to bring forward item 10. SDNPA Report

10. SDNPA Report

- Cllr Alun Aylesbury advised that, along with Cllr Andrew Shaxson, he was re-elected as the West Sussex representative on the SDNPA Board for a four-year term.

Cllr Aylesbury reported that work is in progress to update the Local Plan and that Horsham District Council have withdrawn from the delegated planning arrangement, with negotiations still underway in Chichester. The SDNPA will become heavily weighted towards planning should Chichester withdraw.

- There have been staffing changes at senior level, the Chief Executive recently retired and has been temporarily replaced by the Chief Planning Officer who has also been temporary replaced.
- Cllrs Aylesbury and Shaxson recently attended a Strategic Direction Day where funding was discussed and it was generally acknowledged that funding has been generous. The general position of the SDNPA is good and effects should not be serious if funding is reduced. Climate change was also discussed, the SDNPA are keen to progress in terms of carbon neutrality and climate change.
- The CEO reported that he is currently organising an SDNPA bi-election which has attracted four, possibly five, candidates.

Following a query, Cllr Aylesbury advised that the SDNPA have not yet declared a Climate Emergency, but that work is in progress. He further advised that the SDNPA deal with planning matters in the eight parishes within Mid-Sussex.

The Chair thanked Cllr Aylesbury for his updated and asked to be kept updated.

15:31 Cllr Aylesbury left the meeting.

7. DALCS: to discuss the incorporation of all DALC activities into WSALC

The CEO explained that each of the four district associations (DALCs) has experienced difficulties in the past with recruiting and maintaining bank account signatories and continuous access to the accounts resulting in them being unable to progress the associations and that, in some cases, WSALC have subsidised the DALCs. He suggested that in order to support the DALCs, the accounts and administration are incorporated into WSALC, with the individual DALC funds being issued separate budget lines.

Following discussions, it was AGREED to take the proposal to each individual DALC and return to the item for ratification at the next Board meeting should they all agree.

8. Reports by District Associations

- a) **Adur:** In the absence of the representative there was no update.
- b) **Arun:** Cllr Alison Cooper advised that she attended the ADALC Conference on 1st December at Arundel where Andrew Griffiths MP was in attendance. There was nothing further to report.
- c) **Chichester:** Cllr Andrew Shaxson reported that no CDALC meeting has taken place since the previous Board meeting in July as he wished to be able to report back with any updates from Chichester District Council (CDC) and has been unable to secure a meeting with them. Cllr Shaxson and Trevor Leggo are now due to meet with the Leader of CDC and possibly two senior officers, although not the Chief Executive. A list of questions has been sent to the Leader in advance of the meeting, both strategic questions and questions submitted by member councils.

Cllr Charles Britton expressed his concern regarding Cllr Aylesbury's comments on delegated planning and the potential impact of CDC withdrawing from the arrangement may have on planning matters.

- d) **Horsham:** Cllr Val Court advised that there has been no meeting of HALC since the joint meeting of the Horsham District Association and Horsham District Council held on 26th July. A meeting is scheduled to take place on 21st February when a new Chair will be elected. The WSALC Chair and CEO will attend the meeting in support of Cllr Court.
- e) **Mid Sussex:** Cllr Denham St. Pinnock, WSALC Chair and Chair of MSALC, reported that he is due to meet with Mid Sussex District Council along with the CEO in a few weeks' time. There was nothing further to report.

9. Clerks Update

- Julie Holden advised that she is aware of some clerks in neighbouring counties that do not receive much support and thanked WSALC for the support they provide clerks.
- The new NALC/SLCC model clerk contract has been released.
- The SLCC Sussex Branch are hoping to hold a social event for clerks in July to bring clerks together, particularly those that work alone to give them a sense of community amongst their fellow clerks.
- Julie suggested that training on dealing with FOIs and press handling could be provided by WSALC. The CEO confirmed that Breakthrough Communications currently provide training on those topics and suggested that they are approached to run a session for WSALC members which WSALC could fund.

It was AGREED to allocate a budget of up to £500 to fund an FOI and Social Media training session and to approach Breakthrough Communications with a proposal to run the session.

11. Matters for discussion not on the agenda

- The Chair advised the Board that he had received a proposal from Cllr Shaxson that WSALC meet with West Sussex County Council to matters of a strategic nature. He explained that he had raised the matter at the recent WSALC Chairs Forum and asked the Chairs in attendance to submit questions that they would like to ask WSCC if such a meeting took place.

Cllr Shaxson added that, in his experience, WSCC have difficulty communicating with parish and town councils and that there needs to be an efficient way of dealing with matters.

It was AGREED to arrange a meeting with the Chief Executive of WSCC attended by the WSALC Chair and CEO.

The CEO suggested that Board Members send any questions that they would like raised at the meeting to himself and Anna Beams.

- The Chairman raised the matter of councillors redacting addresses and details on Declaration of Interest forms which had been highlighted at the recent Chairs Forum.

The CEO pointed out that this conflicts with advice being received regarding councillors safety and also the fact that nomination papers do not require a full address. The matter has been raised with NALC and the CEO will report back.

16:19 Cllr Alison Cooper left the meeting.

- The Chair advised the Board that he would like to propose at the next Board meeting that WSALC appoint a Deputy CEO to protect the continuation of WSALC business should the CEO not be available.

12. Future Board meetings

Friday 26th April 2024 @ 2:30pm by Zoom

16:27 Meeting closed.

Signed (Chair):

Dated:

DRAFT

APPENDIX A

WSALC Limited – Management Accounts Reporting for the quarter to 31st December 2023.

The association continues to move firmly forward through 2023/24 with a strong financial footing, I don't anticipate any significant costs for the remainder of the year unless the board makes other plans. Q3 has been entirely consistent with previous quarters.

Looking to the future I continue to propose only 2% nominal increase in subscriptions, which politically our members will appreciate in these times of rising costs and financial uncertainty.

The association is able to implement some top down project work, should it wish to do so.

Income

Subscription income is £95,5,543 (2023: £93,615) of which £560.61, 3 councils remains unpaid as at the management accounts date. Statements will be issued and the CEO/office will call the councils concerned after the board meeting.

Expenditure

The costs incurred to date are £80,046 against a total year end budget of £114,493. We are currently forecasting a year-end expenditure total of £121,955. The largest cost item is NALC fees at £33,080, followed by salaries and Ni at £18,873.

All costs are listed within this pack.

Bank & Cash Balances

At the 31st December 2023 there was £78,102 in the current account and £50,692 in the deposit account.

A copy of the bank statement is provided with this pack.

Year End Forecast

It is anticipated that there will be a surplus of £13,406 (2023: £25,966) at the year-end date. This will be subject to change as the year progresses and depending also on board decisions re future spending.

Future Forecasts

Based on an annual 2% increase, the surplus would be circa £5k each year after allowing for £10k on special projects spending for the benefit of the membership.

I would therefore propose the following charges per elector

2024/25 £0.3185p per elector	{ income circa £97.4K }
2025/26 £0.3248p per elector	{ income circa £99.3K }
2026/27 £0.3313p per elector	{ income circa £101.3K }

Reserves

The association carried forward into the 2023/24 year £82,085. This is with in the new recommend guidance issued by Jpag as between 3 and 12 months of net revenue expenditure. It is anticipated that the year end reserves will be in the region of £95,491

APPENDIX B

Report of CEO

[a] Support for 'troubled councils'

With an increasing number of troubled councils, often caused by an individual councillor, it is clear that these councils would benefit from closer support. Whilst the Monitoring Officer exists to deal with Code of Conduct complaints, there are no effective remedies. In the case of Nuthurst PC, Horsham DC MO asked the late Councillor Malcolm Eastwood and me to assist. Sadly our intervention has only been partially successful with certain councillors still believing they can do anything and with no real prospect of cohesion amongst all councillors. I have probably lost count, but I believe the Council has had 6 different locum clerks since May 2023.

Despite the Nuthurst experience it is suggested that a 'task force' of two Board Members, with officer support meet with the Chairman and others and offer advice and guidance. The Board may wish to impose guidelines as to how many hours of CEO time is spent with an individual council. This action should offer reassurance to Chairmen and Clerks and hopefully bring matters back on track provided councillors are prepared to listen.

[b] Civility and Respect

All local councils in West Sussex will shortly be invited to indicate if they have signed the Civility & Respect Pledge, and if not, why not?

Nationally over 1,400 councils have done so and it is a very clear statement that they wish to stamp out toxic behaviour, negative attitudes and bullying.

To date in East Sussex 28 councils out of 100 declared to have signed the Pledge.

[c] Communications Strategy

At a time when local government expenditure is under even closer scrutiny, WSALC will be aware that some member councils will question the value of their subscriptions. It is suggested that fresh initiatives be considered to add value to membership, one of which could be a clear Communications Strategy and a starting point for this being a regular newsletter, either quarterly or half yearly.

Content would come from member councils themselves sharing experience or showcasing initiatives they have put in place. The Isle of Wight ALC newsletter is an excellent example of this approach where local councils are proud to share examples of activities supporting their communities.

An oral update on how this could be approached will be given at the Meeting.

[d] Clerk recruitment and retention

The challenge we face is to ensure there is a sufficient number of experienced Clerks in the market to satisfy the needs of member councils. It is recognised that all councils would ideally like someone to 'hit the ground running' when a vacancy occurs but it is not always the case for reasons of location, salary or reputation that a supply of applicants is available.

One way to overcome this shortage is to equip prospective applicants with awareness training about the benefits of being a part time Clerk; to this end we have set up a tutorial group of 3 people working towards ILCA with two on attachment to councils to gain wider experience. If the Board believes this to be a sound approach, we can promote the idea more widely.

Salary level can be a bit of a barrier in some councils but if councillors are prepared to be flexible, a field of candidates will emerge, for example both Ditchling and Alfriston offered a range of £22 - £26 per hour and secured 8 candidates and 6 candidates respectively. A similar pattern is developing in West Sussex with Plaistow and Ifold PC offering the same salary and having a choice of qualified and experienced candidates, enabling an appointment to be made..

If an untrained clerk is taken on, mentoring support can be arranged at a cost to the Council with hours based on the level of need.

[e] The Honours system

The Board may be aware that in the recent New Year Honours no one in West Sussex associated with the local council sector appeared to be a recipient, the CEO scans the list twice a year and it is clear that the number of recipients from our Sector is diminishing.

In other counties it is understood the County Council has an Honours Committee to consider and put forward names of those recommended; if the Board so wishes an approach can be made to WSCC to see if there is an appetite for something similar.

Trevor Leggo, CEO, 9th January 2024