

NALC Chief Executive's bulletin

Events, dear boy, events...

No not the famous Harold Macmillan quote, but it's been a particularly busy week of notable events at NALC and across the country, with nearly 400 people joining our Annual General Meeting (AGM) and events on health and wellbeing, and hundreds of you responding to the government's consultation on the planning white paper...

NALC AGM 2020

Two historic firsts this week as we held our AGM virtually on 27 October, with part of it live-streamed, here are a few highlights and reflections:

- In his speech, the minister for Regional Growth and Local Government, Luke Hall MP, thanked the sector for inspirationally stepping up during pandemic, recognised the impact on council finances and restated the government's expectation for principal councils to support local councils, confirmed the government would consider extending remote meetings, remains committed to publishing a devolution and recovery white paper including an empowered role for local councils, and proposes to close a loophole on parish polls being held before May 2021. You can watch the speech again [here](#).
- I was pleased the leading local government magazine LGC covered the minister's speech quite extensively in this story [here](#).
- There was unanimous support for a statement on the planning white paper calling on the government to ensure the sector has a strong role in the planning system.
- Our [Annual Report and accounts](#) were approved, including the affiliation fee for 2021/22 of 7.42 pence per elector with a cap of £1,900 for larger councils

Health and wellbeing series of events

Another first for us this week was holding four events on the theme of health and wellbeing, as part of our Rebuilding Communities series of online events. We were joined by a plethora of really engaging and knowledgeable speakers offering insights and practical advice on health challenges during and beyond the pandemic, partnership working, hidden disabilities and mental health. We'll be sharing more information next week including presentation slides and adding new resources to our dedicated [health and wellbeing webpage](#). A huge thank you to NALC's partners BHIB Councils Insurance, CCLA and Blachere Illumination, for their support, and also to Came and Company, Centre for Ageing Better, Epilepsy

Society, HAGS and Parish Online, who also sponsored this week's events.

Launch of PM backed dementia guide

At this morning's online event on Local Councils and Hidden Disabilities, I was thrilled that NALC, alongside the University of Plymouth, published our *[Dementia-Friendly Communities guide](#)*. The guide has been **endorsed by the prime minister, Boris Johnson MP, in this letter** and encourages all local councils to implement dementia-friendly practises. It is fantastic to see that the good work of our councils has been supported by the prime minister and I look forward to seeing the legacy of this guide in caring for the most vulnerable in our community! You can also read more in our news story [here](#).

NALC responds to planning white paper

This week we **urged the government to keep communities at the heart of planning** in our response to the consultation on the white paper. We argued that the current proposals would result in a democratic deficit in planning and would not tackle the key issue of housing supply, leading to a slow-down in the delivery of more housing. However, there are some points in the white that NALC does welcome, including the need to strengthen neighbourhood planning and to put more emphasis on building design. Thank you to everyone who responded to our own consultation which helped us develop our own response.

County officer's forum

I was delighted to join the county officer's forum for part of their meeting on 28 October, whose agenda included a presentation from our partners CCLA, borrowing, CiLCA training, finance and VAT.

October Tree Charter newsletter

The theme of **October's Tree Charter Newsletter** is biodiversity, with our stories focussing on how Hassocks Parish Council, Lyndhurst Parish Council and Matlock Town Council are planning ahead to protect their communities from climate change and safeguard their green spaces. Do let us know what you are doing to protect trees and woodland at policycomms@nalc.gov.uk.

New neighbourhood planning research

My top long-read this week was the long-awaited report on **The Impacts of Neighbourhood Planning** by the University of Reading. Conducted between September 2019 and March 2020, this extensive research project surveyed councils, consultants, the development industry, as well as both communities who have

completed a neighbourhood plan and those who have struggled to complete their Plan. Its findings are organised by six research objectives: development impacts and housing supply, other development impacts (including quality of development), decision-making and investment, community attitudes and engagement, the influence of geography, success factors and common barriers. I was struck by the fact that less than 10% of designated neighbourhood areas are forum-led, in unparished as well as urban areas, and the majority of planning authority areas with no neighbourhood planning activity is in urban areas. As we told the housing minister at a recent roundtable event, in order to extend neighbourhood planning it needs strengthening and plans protecting, and by setting up new local councils everywhere!

Standards consultation

The Committee on Standards in Public Life has issued a new **consultation** (login required) as part of its review into the institutions, processes and structures in place to support high standards of conduct. We will be building on our previous submissions to the Committee and responding, so please let us know your views to policy.comms@nalc.gov.uk by 4 December.

And finally...

Next week sees the reintroduction of the Environment Bill to Parliament for its Committee stage in the House of Commons. We've briefed Parliamentarians on the part an increasing number of you are playing to tackle the climate emergency and create a greener, more environmentally friendly and sustainable communities. We also call for the Bill to be more community-friendly through a role for councils in Local Nature Recovery Partnerships and with new powers and funding.