



# Chief executive's bulletin

## Coronavirus

As the Coronavirus situation develops, we all should be using government advice to inform decisions and be checking that advice regularly. The Local Government Association (LGA) has published a very useful [list of different government advice sources](#) including for employers. Additionally, you may find the [advice](#) from ACAS useful in considering any employment-related matters that may impact your local (parish and town) council.

Where the law does not provide for a particular scenario (e.g. the holding of the annual council meeting outside of the statutory timeframe, if the government advises against meetings being held) we would be guided by the government as to what should happen. We will be engaging with government on this and a range of other issues and will keep you updated on any developments.

NALC itself as an organisation is affected and we have been revisiting our risk and continuity plans accordingly. As the government advice currently is broadly business, as usual, next week's Lobby Day and meeting of National Assembly will go ahead, we plan to hold our next cycle of meetings by telephone conference, but Spring conference has been postponed (more on that below). We also still plan to keep any commitments to attend events and meetings across the country. Of course, if government advice changes then we will reassess and communicate as soon as possible.

While we expect to continue to work as normal, it is worth preparing for all eventualities. Having considered our different communications channels, if there is a significant reduction in NALC capacity, then at a minimum we will keep the NALC website up to date with that information. This would be the first port of call for any local council wishing to know the status of our capacity.

## **NALC Spring Conference postponed**

Yesterday we were informed that Aviva has taken the responsible decision, given its size, to cancel for the foreseeable future all internal and external events at Aviva due to the risk of Coronavirus. The Aviva City of London office remains open. As a result, NALC's Spring Conference due to be held on 17 March in the Auditorium of the Aviva City of London office is being postponed, and will now take place at a later date to be confirmed. Given the nature of the circumstances, and these being out of NALC's control, we do hope those scheduled to attend will understand. More details will be made available in due course.

## **NALC chairman meets Centre for Ageing Better and ACRE**

It was another busy week of meetings for our chairman, Cllr Sue Baxter, here are a few highlights:

- On 2 March, Sue and I met colleagues from the **Centre for Ageing Better** at their national steering group to discuss working together to promote age-friendly communities, places where people of all ages are able to live healthy and active later lives. As you would expect, our local councils are already getting involved including in Melksham, Banbury and many on the Isle of Wight. And as the population continues to age, local councils could play a big part in this initiative and we explored possible areas of joint work. Do also check out this **[blog post on the NALC website](#)** and let us know if you are participating in any age-friendly initiatives.
- Sue met the chairman of Action with Communities in Rural England (ACRE), Jeremy Leggett, on 4 March. ACRE is, like NALC, also a member of the Rural Coalition, and discussions covered a range of issues including engagement with the new government including the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, Local Enterprise Partnerships, Shared Prosperity Fund, devolution and the forthcoming white paper

## **LGC article by devolution minister**

Staying on the subject of devolution, there was an encouraging article in LGC magazine by Simon Clarke MP (Middlesbrough South and East Cleveland), the minister of state in the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, whose brief includes devolution and the 'levelling up' agenda.

The piece reports "Simon Clarke has promised that the upcoming English devolution white paper will "unlock devolution" not only at the macro-level of mayoral combined authorities but down to the town and parish councils". This is consistent with a number of other messages we have been picking up from a range of sources, including discussions with officials and work we are doing to inform the forthcoming

white paper.

There will be an opportunity to press this and the potential of the sector to build stronger communities in discussions which we are hoping county associations and local councils are having with your MPs. Representatives from the 43 county associations will be making the case too at next week's Lobby Day on 10 March in their meetings with so far over 50 Parliamentarians.

### **Improvement and Development Board**

The Improvement and Development Board met on 4 March at the NALC office for its first meeting of the year, here's a summary:

- Congratulations to Sally Longmate (Suffolk) and Alison Robinson (Gloucestershire) for being appointed as new county officer representatives to the Board, along with Wendy Amis (Derbyshire) who has been appointed deputy county officer representative
- The Board considered a proposal from Chris Wayman (Worcestershire) and John Crossling (Warwickshire and West Midlands) for councillor training, with both joining the meeting via teleconference. This would involve having a national framework for what councillors should be trained in and also integrating a Continuous Professional Development scheme for councillors. Whilst the scheme is at a developmental stage, the Board endorsed the proposal and will provide support as it develops.
- There was an update on improvement and development projects including the Local Council Award Scheme, with notification some councils were coming to the end of their four-year accreditation, plus an update on good progress on the Local Council Award Scheme national accreditation panel; and on the Certificate in Local Council Administration, the Board acknowledged the best performing counties comprising Sussex and Surrey, Essex and Norfolk, noting Leicestershire and Rutland continues to have a strong record for registration to passes conversions. Well done to those county association colleagues!

### **And finally...**

Some good media coverage from the BBC last weekend. Frome Town Council's award-winning Community Fridge featured in **Countryfile's** story on food poverty in rural areas and food banks. **Sunday Politics North East** covered our 'toilet tax' campaign including an interview with Richard Holden MP (North West Durham) and also co-chair of the All-Party Parliamentary Group on local democracy. And Bungay Town Council were on the **Politics Show East** talking about the high street and empty shops, the expanding role of the town council including taking on more services, and a call for better contact with the county council on highways issues.

Jonathan Owen.

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