

From: **National Association of Local Councils** newsletter@nalc.gov.uk
Subject:  CHIEF EXECUTIVE'S BULLETIN
Date: 15 May 2020 at 15:00
To: clerk@waddingham.gov.uk



Chief executive's bulletin

Coronavirus webpage update

Our dedicated [coronavirus webpage](#) has now received over 101,000 hits. Updates this week included a blog from BHIB Councils Insurance with tips on tackling increased vandalism, a summary of results from our recent financial impact survey, updated guidance on holding remote meetings to include more information on risks, security and telephone conference calls, and a range of sources of information to help local (parish and town) councils understand this new stage.

Media coverage on the financial impact on councils

BBC Radio Shropshire has continued to lead the way in shining a light on the financial challenges facing local councils. On 7 May, the chairman of the Shropshire Association of Local Councils, Cllr Ray Wickson, was on the afternoon show talking about their letter to the secretary of state (you can [listen again](#) between 2:35:49 – 2:43:47). And our head of policy and communications, Justin Griggs, took to the airwaves on 8 May, thanking councils for leading their communities in creative ways to mark #VE75Day, going on to highlight NALC's research and call for a dedicated package of support from the government. You can [listen again](#) between 11:46 – 18:35 and read more in this [Twitter thread](#).

Ministerial webinar

Sue and Justin participated in this week's ministerial webinar hosted by the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government for local government leaders. We took the opportunity to ask ministers to include information on local councils in data returns from principal councils to government, and if they would convene a virtual roundtable meeting to hear direct from town councils. We've followed this up with the director of local government finance and I will keep you posted.

Chairman and vice-chairman videoconference

On 10 May NALC's senior staff met remotely with our chairman, Cllr Sue Baxter (Worcestershire), vice-chairman (finance), Cllr Keith Stevens (East Sussex) and vice-chairman (member services), Cllr Mike Drew (Avon) and updated them on how NALC services were operating in the current situation. Homeworking is going well and whilst there were no plans to reopen our office at present, we would begin to consider how best to progress a risk assessment. We also agreed to work closely with the Centre for London to encourage the establishment of more community councils in the capital.

Smaller Authorities' Audit Appointments (SAAA)

SAAA met on 13 May to agree its financial regulations and budget for next year, and consider the implications of the current situation for the completion of the Annual Governance and Accountability Returns (AGAR). Can I urge councils to complete returns in good time, safely and in line with government advice on social distancing? You can read more about SAAA's work on their [website](#).

County officer videoconference

On 13 May we held our weekly NALC and county officer Zoom meeting, hosted by our head of member services, Charlotte Eisenhart. At the start of the meeting, we were pleased to be joined by colleagues from Parish Online to discuss how county associations and local councils could maximise the benefits of digital mapping. The rest of the meeting focussed on what local council meetings might look like in the future, and how we can best advise and support councils on these matters.

Improvement and Development Board (IDB)

The IDB held its first virtual meeting on 12 May. The Board welcomed the new county officer representatives, Alison Robinson (Gloucestershire), Sally Longmate (Suffolk), and Wendy Amis (Derbyshire). Updates were provided on the coronavirus effort and the opportunities that are available to the sector, including online learning. The Board also noted progress on the Local Council Award Scheme including the national pilot, and CiLCA, with both programmes to be reviewed in 2020 in consultation with stakeholders. An update was also provided on NALC's recently published research on the May 2019 local elections.

New legal guidance

Our Legal Topic Note (LTN) 31 on local council general powers has been updated to better explain the eligibility criteria to exercise the general power of competence and the latest Section 137 spending limit. You can find the LTN in the member's area of

the [NALC website](#) (login required).

On the blogs

New on the NALC blog are more [reflections on homeworking](#) from my colleagues, plus the Church of England's national rural officer writes about the [resilience of local communities](#). And Jane Wills of Exeter University has written for the Royal Geographical Society about how [out of the ashes, the phoenix of the parish rises again](#). I think the challenge for us all is to harness this community enthusiasm for local action and hyper localism and encourage people to get more involved in the ongoing work of local councils and the communities they support.

And finally...

Next week is Mental Health Awareness Week (18-24 May) and this year's theme is kindness. Mental health is always important, none more so now during this period of lockdown, so do be kind to yourself as well as others! I know how much work our councils are continuing to do to ensure the safety and wellbeing of our communities – do keep up the good work. You can find up-to-date materials from Mental Health First Aid, England on ideas for [ways to be kind to yourself and others](#) on their website.

Jonathan Owen



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