



Chief executive's bulletin

18 April 2024

NALC chair gives evidence to select committee in parliament

Among the nine consultation responses and submissions we made to the government and parliament in the last three months was our written evidence to the Levelling Up, Housing and Communities Committee inquiry on the Office for Local Government (Oflog). I was pleased NALC was then invited to follow this up by giving oral evidence to the Committee, and our chair, Cllr Keith Stevens, was among six witnesses who spoke at the session held on 15 April 2024. It was good to see the local government trade magazine [LGC run a story on Keith's contributions](#), where he stressed that Oflog's scope should be expanded to include our sector. That data should be collected on our councils to gain a comprehensive understanding of an area, enable trend-spotting, and take preventative action if needed. Keith also spoke about how our councils were growing in size, spending and importance, but that current data on our sector was limited and fragmented as it was not part of the new system. He reiterated our proposal to pilot data gathering with some of our largest councils. He highlighted the absence of government investment in sector support and improvement compared to extensive funding provided to the Local Government Association. You can [watch the session back on parliamentlive.tv](#).

NALC makes the move from print to pixel

I'm excited to announce that we will immediately transition from [print to exclusively digital publications](#). This is a significant step in our broader commitment to a digital-first strategy, which already includes moving office space, transforming digital operations, and developing a new website and CRM system. The move is supported by county associations and further certifies our commitment to tackling climate change and follows NALC's declaration of a climate emergency at the Annual Conference in 2019. There will also be significant climate benefits by reducing paper consumption, energy usage, waste generation, and carbon emissions, paving the way for a greener and more sustainable future. All existing [NALC digital publications](#), including the popular The Good Councillor's guide, will remain freely available to members.

Smaller Councils Committee

NALC's Smaller Councils Committee held its in-person session at the NALC's London offices on 16 April 2024. Here are some highlights:

- The committee considered a proposal from Alcester Town Council for NALC to lobby for local councils to have the same rights as burial authorities in London to reuse graves subject to legal conditions. This was supported and will be routed to our Policy Committee.
- Annie Child, chief executive at Smaller Authorities Audit Appointments (SAAA), gave a presentation on the role of SAAA, the recent report on the results of the auditor's work and SAAA's audit lobbying points back to government.
- The committee endorsed the establishment of a new national network for 'micro councils' comprising smaller local councils with either an annual budgeted precept or annual budgeted turnover of £10,000 or less. This new network will be set up over the summer of 2024 on the same basis as all of NALC's other national networks. It will aim to meet in the Summer, acting as a sounding board for issues specific to the smallest local council special interest group.
- It was agreed that committee members would send NALC relevant links of relevance to smaller local councils to help them take environmental action for upload to the NALC [climate change web page](#). The committee also received a presentation from Cllr Ed Gemmell, leader of the Climate Party, on his local council's actions, Hazlemere Parish Council in Buckinghamshire, to fight climate change.

NALC quarterly activity report

This week, we [published our latest quarterly activity report](#) covering January to March 2024. Key highlights include:

- The publication of the chair's open letter set out his hopes, aspirations and priorities for 2024.
- Successful renewal of NALC's Cyber Essentials certification for the second consecutive year.
- Three NALC online events had over 500 attendees with a 97% recommendation rate.
- NALC responded to nearly 400 requests for legal and HR advice.
- The [Local Council Award Scheme](#) successfully accredited 13 councils this quarter and conducted a consultation on changes to the criteria.
- The [Practitioners' Guide 2024](#) was published, and our forward plan for publications includes the updated Model Financial Regulations, due to be published later this month, and the Good Councillor's guide in May.

On the blog: The Big Help Out

[This week's blog](#) from The Big Help Out team highlights the significant role of volunteering during the pandemic, showcasing how millions of people came together to support each other, emphasising volunteering as a vital source of connection. However, it points out a decline in volunteer numbers post-pandemic. The Together Coalition, initiated during the King and Queen's Coronation, launched the Big Help Out, a massive volunteer mobilisation campaign. The first edition saw 7.2 million participants and won the Charity Time Collaboration of the Year Award. Now gearing up for its second year, the Big Help Out aims for scale, sustainability, and inclusivity, aligning with Volunteers' Week in June 2024. It aims to transform the campaign into an annual event, fostering sustained engagement and reaching diverse communities. The blog invites readers to join in, emphasising the transformative potential of volunteering to unite communities. [Read the blog to find out more!](#)

Last chance to grab tickets to our upcoming finance event

Time is running out to secure your spot at our highly anticipated event on emerging trends in local government finance. We're down to the last few tickets, and they're selling fast! The event on 24 April 2024 will offer insights into the shared financial risks confronting local councils and principal authorities. You will gain practical knowledge on safeguarding councils from prevalent financial threats anticipated to impact local government entities in the years ahead. [Grab your tickets](#) today and [learn more about the event](#) on our website.

The Carbon Literacy Project

The Carbon Literacy Project is organising an [engaging online event](#) aimed at councils, authorities and organisations that are delivering or exploring the delivery of Carbon Literacy (CL) using its Local Authorities Toolkit. On 15 May 2024 at 3 pm, the Carbon Literacy Project Local Authorities team will be joined by guest speakers from CDP and Sniffer, where they will dive into an interesting exploration of these two organisations that are working within local authorities to drive action for a more sustainable future. Local (parish and town) councils are welcome to book the event. They will gain a case study from a local authority using CDP's reporting service, a deeper understanding of Adaptation Scotland's adaptation framework, and a chance to ask questions, talk to the CL team and guest speakers, and learn more about CL for local authorities.

Fortnightly meeting between NALC and county officers

In this week's meeting between NALC and county officers, we were pleased to have Steve Parkinson from the Parkinson Partnership join us. He discussed some proposed changes to the model financial regulations and received colleague feedback. He also suggested improving guidance on how the model should be used. The meeting also discussed the Corporate Peer Challenge for larger councils and how we can involve county associations more in this project, the [recently published SAAA annual report](#), and the future format for our meetings with county officers.

Campaign for National Parks nature health report

On 10 April 2024, the Campaign for National Parks published its National Parks nature health report, highlighting the desperate state of nature in our protected landscapes and the need for urgent action. The report says that without legal designation and the enhanced protections and oversight provided by dedicated National Park Authorities, the situation for these landscapes and their biodiversity would be considerably more dire. A staggering statistic from the report revealed that only 6% of the total land area of National Parks is currently managed effectively for nature. On top of this, just 5 of the 880 water bodies in National Parks meet the highest status. I would urge you all to read the [full report](#).

And finally...

I hear that [this article in the FT](#) is causing shockwaves in the city, with 37,000 views on X (formerly Twitter)! Margaret Heffernan, entrepreneur, broadcaster, and Somerset parish councillor, writes that it's on her parish council that she's seen some of the best leadership in her career, serving residents, working simply to make life as safe, comfortable and happy as it can. She concludes she wishes the parish council was where more executive careers began. Yet another reason to encourage more people to get involved in their local council and make a change!

Jonathan Owen.



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