



North Shropshire Area Committee – 24th March 2025

Report of Chief Officer

Since the last meeting in January, the Executive met on 4th February, which Chairman, Councillor Ray Wickson will cover in more detail.

The Executive received presentations on the Care Leavers' Covenant (which the Association had previously signed up to) and an update from Mike Adams on the Severn Valley Flood Management scheme. The next meeting is on 8th April.

It is likely that following the elections on 1st May, Shropshire Council will be launching a community governance review of parish and town councils across Shropshire. Currently there are no precise details or timescales, but we will keep members updated as information becomes available.

The Government has been consulting on potential changes to the standards framework. The Association has responded both to the consultation and the consultation carried out by NALC, supporting the proposed changes. The consultation closed on 26th February.

Following the amendments to the Constitution at the AGM, the Executive received a report on a review of our Area Committee's and the current structure. A task & finish group is in the process of being established – which includes representation from all Area Committees. As part of the review, the Area Committee will be consulted, which will help inform the outcome and formation of any representations. Your Chairman and Vice Chairman will be members of this task & finish group.



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The Association held a very successful conference on 6th December in Church Stretton, which a number of you attended. The event was well attended and chaired by our President, Katrina Baker. There were some exceptional speakers, and we have now created a tab on the website with access to all the presentations and other materials. A number of follow up workshops were held, again which were well attended, one of which was held in Craven Arms. We are looking how we can support this initiative moving forward and I want to place on record our grateful thanks to Janet Cobb, from Egton Parish Meeting, for all the work she has undertaken on behalf of our sector.

I have continued to attend various meetings with NALC and colleague County Officers for updates on national issues and briefings on NALC led issues.

As reported at the last meeting, some 60% of Shropshire Councils have registered for the revamped NALC website. I do not have the current figures available but if your Council hasn't registered so far, please encourage them to do so. There are plenty of resources and useful available information. A reminder that Councillors can also register – another useful resource for Councillors.

We have started to review our own SALC website, but we will need to plan a complete revamp to make it more user friendly and carry more resources to support our members.

Elections to all our parish & town councils take place on 1st May. The Notice of Election was published on Monday 10th March when nominations open and the pre-election period commences. Nominations close at 4pm on Wednesday 2nd April. The Notice together with nomination packs were sent to all parish clerks ready to display locally from 17th. A briefing took place for all Clerks on Tuesday 25th February with the Elections Team to run through the process for 2025 and answer any questions. For those Clerks unable to attend a copy of the recording and presentation slides were sent. We have also issued appropriate information over recent weeks to all Councils to support the process. Further information is on [Shropshire Council's website](#) and will be updated as the process moves forward. We also have an elections page on our own [website](#). As a means of encouraging residents to consider standing for their parish or town council, we have produced a video involving two Clerks, a local Councillor and members of Oswestry Youth Forum. A news release was sent to the local press and radio from the Chairman encouraging residents to stand and "Make a Difference" to their local community. A number of Councils have placed the press release on their websites. We have also produced an elections guide which has been circulated to all Councils and is also available on our website:



Election Guide 25.doc

At an individual level, we have continued to support and provide advice for Councils as appropriate. A weekly bulletin continues to be sent out to members which we hope is useful. We are also trying to gather examples of local projects and good practice which we can share amongst our members, and we would encourage your Council's provide us with such examples. Shropshire Day was on 23rd February – a day to showcase everything Shropshire. NALC asked us for some examples of the great work being undertaken by our members which it can share through its social media channels, which we were happy to share, in recognition of the day. One of which was Wem Rural

Parish Council for its work on a number of initiatives. This gives us another opportunity to celebrate the work of our members and the benefit it brings to our communities.

We are yet to “relaunch” the Local Council Award Scheme here in Shropshire. Details will be sent to members over the coming weeks as we look to promote the scheme and encourage member to seek accreditation under it. As part of this we will look to hold an online training event.

Gail has circulated details of the 2025 training programme and Councils are starting to book places for their members which is encouraging. I attended the session on 11th February led by trainer Kim Bedford on Fundamentals for Councils. This was a very good session. I would encourage Councils to look at the programme to see what future events their members might like to attend. The programme will continue to develop throughout the year and if there are topics you think it would be useful to cover, please let us know. Our current programme is below:



Online Training
Programme 2025.pdf

Post election, we will also be looking to focus on the [civility & respect agenda](#). In addition to seeking to provide training on the code of conduct and standards framework we will be encouraging all Councils to consider signing up to the civility & respect agenda to remind all Councillors of the expected behaviour and promote appropriate standards amongst all.

SALC has continued to meet with Shropshire Council via the Joint Working Group and last met on 19th February. Issues considered were highways and the Fix My Street system, CIL, update on the Local Plan & NPPF, update on the northwest relief road, Severn Valley Water Management Scheme and empty shops on the High Street. A programme of meetings is in place for the coming year and the next meeting is due in April.

The Devolution White Paper doesn't have any direct implications for parishes (in fact parishes are only mentioned three times) but there could be an impact should Shropshire and Telford & Wrekin merge with others to form a larger unitary authority. It is also an opportunity for the importance of our sector to be raised in the discussions with government and the contribution it can make to the life of our communities.

Jonathan Owen, NALC CEO in a recent article wrote:

Power Shift 2025: Will devolution deliver?

“There will be many views on the English Devolution White Paper's headlines of more mayors with extra powers and half a million population unitaries. However, setting those

aside, there is plenty to welcome, and NALC will work with the government and others on the details.

Firstly, there is a welcome emphasis on devolution going beyond mayors to communities and neighbourhoods where parish and town councils can play a key role.

As NALC's chair commented, "Effective devolution must recognise the role of England's 10,000 parish and town councils as the community tier of local government. They can be a strong voice for our most local neighbourhoods and help address fears of remote government resulting from any larger unitaries set up. By strengthening their role, the government can ensure that devolution delivers tangible benefits for communities nationwide."

Secondly, relations between central and local government, parish and town councils, and principal authorities need to be reset.

Thirdly, some sensible financial reforms, including multi-year financial settlements (let's hope then referendum principles go!) and simpler, less competitive grant allocations.

Then, there are a myriad of sound practical proposals, many of which NALC has long called for, including reviewing local audits, strengthening the standards regime to include sanctions, remote meetings, developing the local government workforce, supporting the development of councillors, and removing barriers to their attraction and retention.

NALC provided a briefing for its National Assembly Members and County Officers. A copy of the slides included below:



English-Devolution-
White-Paper-presenta

In a letter to NALC, parliamentary under-secretary of state for local growth and building safety) Alex Norris MP commented, "As we continue to develop our longer-term strategy for communities, I am firmly committed to working together, and with the wider parish sector so that our approach is informed by those who understand the diverse and complex challenges that our communities face. To this end, I welcome any further ideas, research and evidence that you are open to sharing with my team. I look forward to our continued collaboration as we take forward this important work."

Amen to that.

It is a real opportunity for the sector to stake its claim as the community tier of local government, and parish and town councils must be ready to rise to the challenge."

Andy Begley in a recent Staff Briefing said:

“Plans for devolution

We are expecting to hear more about the government's plans for devolution and local government reorganisation next week and whether we need to become some form of strategic regional authority.

At present it is not clear what the plans involve and what they mean for us here in Shropshire, but the Local Government Association has provided a guide to some frequently asked questions which you can read by clicking on the blue button below.

I'll let you know more as soon as we have greater clarity on the plans.”

[LGA Devolution FAQs](#)

There has been no further update since.

On the devolution of services issue here in Shropshire, a number of our members have sought to work with and support Shropshire Council to try and secure the future of local services. The budget consultation referred to services being provided by other organisations including parish and town councils. We are trying to establish how this might be progressed and likely timescales. I have met with Helen Ball (Shrewsbury) and Arren Roberts (Oswestry) to look at how we might respond to and support Councils on the devolution of services issue here in Shropshire. As a result, we have launched a survey of all our members gathering information covering a number of aspects which will help inform how we might approach the future. SALC's Devolution Services Working Group is met on 4th March to review progress and agree some next steps. On the back of the survey we are holding a joint SLCC / SALC event on 21st March for all Clerks to look at how we can ensure our sector is prepared to meet the challenges and opportunities the future will bring. We are also looking to learn from the likes of Cornwall and Somerset who have experience of the devolution of services and assets.

Since the last NSAC meeting, there has been one meeting of the informal Chairs Network with over 25 attendees. A range of issues were covered, and it is a useful opportunity for Chairs to meet on an informal basis. The next meeting has been set for Thursday 19th June at 6pm via Zoom.

Following the local elections in Shropshire, it is hoped to hold an Executive visioning event to develop SALC's priorities over the coming period. It is also a good opportunity for SALC to refresh, welcome new members after the election and for all members to get to know each other.

Chris Mellings

Chief Officer – March 2025