

# Cumbria Association of Local Councils

## Annual General Meeting 2025

Notes of the 50th Annual General Meeting of the Cumbria Association of Local Councils held on Saturday the 15<sup>th</sup> November 2025.

### Attendees

Name	Council
Mary Bradley	Chairperson of CALC Broughton PC
Sue Castle-Clarke	Vice Chair CALC Ousby PC
David Wilson	Vice Chair CALC Broughton PC
Sonia Hutchinson	Chief Officer CALC
Rachael Kelly	Town & Parish Development Officer – CALC
Lindsay Nicolson	Parish Support Officer – Westmorland and Furness
Scott Thornley	Parish Support Officer - Cumberland
Karen Wood	Admin – CALC
Peter Allison	Chair of NALC's Policy Committee
Roger Atfield	Levens PC
Helen Barlow	Thursby PC
Marion Bowman	Cockermouth TC
Bryan Craig	Dalston / Cummersdale PCs CALC Director
Nigel Clubley	Broughton PC
Jonathan Davies	Clifton PC CALC Director
Gillian Dickinson	Garsdale PC
Nick Ford Cleator	Cleator Moor TC
Nicholas Graham PC	St Bees PC
Mike Higginbotham	Wetheral PC CALC Director
Will Huck	Burneside PC CALC Director
Christine Jordan	Murton PC
Kimberley Lawson	Patterdale PC
Paul Nettleton	Burgh-by-Sands PC
Joy Pemberton Pigott	Above Derwent PC
Andrew Povey	Dent with Cowgill PC CALC Director
Andy Pratt	Millom Without PC CALC Director
Claire Shepherd	Westnewton PC
Peter Smith	Natland PC

**WELCOME:** Councillor Mary Bradley, Chairperson of CALC welcomed everyone to the meeting and introduced the guest Speaker Cllr. Peter Allison from Wilsden Parish Council and Chair of NALC's Policy Committee. Mary went on to explain that the original date for the CALC AGM in October had to be cancelled due to a storm and it had been agreed that the re-arranged AGM would be a virtual meeting on teams because of the short notice.

## MINUTES

### PART 1

#### Business Agenda

1. Apologies for absence

Apologies were noted from:-

2. Valerie	3. Penrith TC
4. Andy	5. Barrow PC CALC

6. Carolyn	7. Threlkeld PC
8. Meg	9. Newby PM
10. Michael	11. Workington TC
12. Joan	13. Crosby Ravensworth PC
14. Jane	15. Kirkoswald PC
16. Gillian	17. Cockermouth TC

2. Minutes of the Annual General Meeting held on 12<sup>th</sup> October 2024

The Minutes of the Annual General Meeting held on 12<sup>th</sup> October 2024 were agreed as a correct record.

3. Presentation of the CALC 2024/25 Annual Review

Mary Bradley presented the annual review, initially thanking Jonathan Davies for providing the photograph for the front cover, she went on to give an overview of what the annual review contained and the role of CALC staff, CALC Board Directors and NALC, suggesting that everyone should take the opportunity to read through it as it is available on the CALC website. Mary went on to explain what CALC is doing with the information it obtained from the member survey it conducted, namely looking at an improved locum service, an internal audit service and support for website development, whilst still continuing to provide training, newsletters, branch meeting events and improved communication. Mary then touched on the important real work that town and parish councils and parish meetings do engaging with the varied communities across the whole of Cumbria that they serve, and how examples of this work are also contained within the annual review.

Mary asked for any questions.

Andrew Povey pointed out that the annual review talks about working closely with the Lake District National Park Authority (LDNPA), and why CALC doesn't have the same relationship with the Yorkshire Dales National Park Authority (YDNPA).

Mary explained that CALC does have a relationship with the YDNPA but that it isn't as formal as the relationship with the LDNPA as the LDNPA pay CALC a grant to undertake work on their behalf with parish and town councils within the park. Sonia Hutchinson agreed that it was on the CALC agenda to work more closely with the YDNPA but reiterated that the closer relationship with the LDNPA is because of the funding they provide, enabling CALC staff to facilitate meetings, and distribute information on their behalf as the CALC staff time is paid for by them.

4. To note the Statement of Accounts for 2024/2025

The Statement of Accounts for 2024/2025 was noted

5. To note the current financial position

Sue Castle-Clarke suggested that next time it would be helpful if the documents being discussed were shared on the screen. Mary said that this would be noted for the next AGM if it is held virtually. Mary also confirmed that all documents being discussed were sent out prior to the meeting.

The current financial position was noted.

6. Appointment of Auditors

It was noted that Saint & Co have been re-appointed as the auditors of Cumbria Association of Local Councils Limited for 2026/2027.

## 7. Subscription Fees

It was noted that the annual increase of the NALC portion of the subscription fees will increase by 3.6% in 2026/2027 and the CALC portion of the subscription fees will increase by 3.5% in 2026/2027 as agreed by the CALC Board. Mary explained that due to the formula used the subscription amount will be in the region of 3.5% and that the actual amount will be confirmed by Karen Wood.

Sonia Hutchinson added that all councils have received a letter giving them an indication of what the subscription amount for 2026/2027 will be depending upon the electorate number for each council which will be confirmed in February. The final figure will be sent to all councils in March 2026.

The increase in subscriptions fees was noted.

## **PART 2**

### **Guest Speaker**

#### **Cllr. Peter Allison from Wilsden Parish Council and Chair of NALC's Policy Committee.**

Mary went on to introduce Cllr. Peter Allison stating that it was a huge pleasure to introduce him and explaining that he is the chair of the NALC Policy Committee. Mary went on to say that she has got to know Peter a little bit over the past 18 months since she has been on one of the NALC committees and also going to the NALC Assembly, she added that Peter's is always full of good information and that the policy area is probably one of the most important things that NALC does. Mary added that having Peter to speak at the AGM is a huge privilege especially as he is going to give everyone an idea of what it feels like to have a mayoral authority which is of particular interest to Cumbrian councils.

Peter Allison thanked Mary for her introduction and added that as well as being chair of NALC Policy Committee he is also a parish councillor in a village just outside Bradford. Peter went on to give a slide presentation which will be circulated with the minutes and added to the CALC website. Peter divided his presentation into two sections the first section was on devolution and the second part of the presentation was on Policy Committee. Following the first half of the presentation Peter opened the floor to questions on devolution.

### **Q and A session on devolution:-**

#### **Andy Pratt Millom Without PC -**

Thanks for that introduction to mayoral authorities in Cumbria. These talks that they are going to set up regarding the mayoral office and the strategic direction in 2026, our election isn't until 2027. In your opinion, is that a waste of time?

#### **Peter Allison –**

In West Yorkshire they set up the Mayor's office before the first elections and the mayoral combined authority covered the leaders of the five district councils. In that first year, one of the leaders of the five districts chaired the mayoral combined authority. So in my view there's a case for it for a year, to set up the practicalities.

**Andrew Povey Dent with Cowgill PC -**

I just wondered, Peter, whether there's any guidance or further detail around these possible neighborhood area committees, especially around size of area or population that they should cover, and also, if new parish or town councils are being created, is there any thinking around what size they should be?

**Peter Allison –**

To take the first question, the government is consulting on the details of neighborhood area committees at the moment, but the general view is that you look at your coherent community and what the community wants, but the size of councils does vary.

**Mary Bradley -**

Mary added that the size and complexity of councils and the advantages of small or large councils has been a discussion point at the NALC Assembly, recognising that there is a huge variety in the size of councils across England.

**Nicholas Graham St Bees PC –**

Good morning, everybody. Nicholas Graham, Parish councillor in St. Bees here. Peter, thank you for a really interesting walk through and presentation. A few months ago in St. Bees, we were graced with the presence of the leader of Cumberland Council at one of our Parish meetings and he walked us through the implications of the new strategic mayoral authority and what was coming our way. I asked him very specifically whether he anticipated this would result in the driving down of any further responsibilities or work towards Parish Council level in Cumberland and he quite specifically said no, it will not. I wondered what your view of this question would be.

**Peter Allison -**

The instinct of a lot of unitary council leaders is to maintain control of as many services as they can, but then the financial reality hits them and they suddenly realize that there's an advantage in handing over some of the responsibilities for certain services to our sector. For instance, I had a meeting a couple of months ago with the new chief executive in Bradford she has previously been chief executive at Cheshire East, which is 100% parished, and prior to that she was a deputy chief executive in Durham, which has also gone through the move to a unitary authority. Both areas have a significant parish sector and she takes the view that Bradford is a council that's got considerable financial challenges and that the council should probably do certain things that it's good at and hand over the things that it's less good at to local communities.

**Nigel Clubleby Broughton PC –**

I want to build on a couple of themes that have already been raised. Is there anything within

central government to monitor how effective this devolution process is to ensure that there is a level of consistency across all of them?

**Peter Allison -**

To some extent but the whole idea of devolution is we devolve power to local areas and by devolving power, we devolve the right for them to set up their own policies for a local area.

**Nigel Clubleby Broughton PC –**

I guess what I'm driving at is that a lot is going to revolve around the mechanism and the structures that are in place within the area into which that power is being devolved. And if we haven't got a particularly good mechanism in place the people within our communities won't get as good a value for money out of that process as other areas where there maybe is a more coherent structure in place.

**Peter Allison -**

Fair comments.

**Jonathan Davies Clifton PC -**

My question is in West Yorkshire, what's your experience been with the actual impact on precepts and council taxes with the mayoral combined authority and has it seen a significant increase in what households are paying?

My reason for the question is the fact that obviously as town and parish councils we set a precept and we've got to be mindful on the impact that has in our local communities and with a new precept potentially landing from a mayor in office in order to fund any meaningful projects what impact is that going to have on Cumbria?

**Peter Allison -**

In terms of West Yorkshire the problems of children's services and social care at the District Council level has dwarfed all other financial problems, and I am not conscious of any other spending or any significant precept increase associated with West Yorkshire so I can't really say why in area like Cumbria that might be different.

**End of Q&A session**

Mary then asked Peter to go through the second part of his presentation on Policy Committee.

Peter then went through the second half of his presentation (slides will be circulated and are on the CALC website).

Mary thanked Peter for the presentation and asked for any questions: -

**Q and A session on NALC Policy Committee:-**

**Kimberley Lawson, Clerk Patterdale PC**

I have been a clerk for nearly 10 years now and I have really noticed the difference across those 10 years. Parish councils are being given more responsibility and there is an increasing demand for a more professional approach in parish councils. However, I am not seeing that reflected when I see parish council jobs advertised. The number of hours that parish councils are giving their clerks to complete all of the work is insufficient for the task. Some of them are completely unrealistic and I wondered whether NALC is aware of this and if they have any ideas for how to tackle it?.

**Peter Allison**

I think it is something that's better addressed at the county association level rather than the individual council. One of the problems is you've got such a diversity of size between the very large parish town councils and small councils.

**Mary Bradley Chair -**

There has been some work done through the management board, a committee is looking at job evaluation and what a Clerk's role encompasses, particularly when it's the RFO role as well as the proper officer, and the complexity of agreeing contracts. Now that work is about to be published, It is so complex because of all the different sizes the council that's making these decisions needs to actually understand what the totality of the role is and we could do a little bit more work on that at CALC. I think it is something which CALC staff and governance committee could put on its agenda going forward.

**Sonia Hutchinson CO**

I was just going to add if I could to that, when we get adverts through, we do challenge them especially with regards to the NALC recommended number of hours per week, but you are right it is something we need to look at on the Staffing and Governance Committee.

**Sue Castle-Clarke Ousby PC**

I would like to ask Peter about a NALC internal policy, in particular why is the annual affiliation fee uplift for the next three years based on the consumer price index each June. I understand this was discussed at the NALC's AGM last Thursday. I ask this because not only is the consumer price index typically higher than the retail price index, but the policy assumes that NALC is entitled to an annual increase for the next three years without any justification for it. I am interested as to why the Consumer Price Index was selected over the retail price index?

**Peter Allison**

I think the first thing I would say is that if you look at the figures the CPI is actually generally much lower than the RPI. Retail pricing index is a much more variable index it sometimes is lower, sometimes higher, but the consumer price index is a much more effective figure. The decision to link this to CPI came out of the problems we had last year when there was an increase proposed of 5% which was very controversial. There was some feedback on it at the AGM and NALC agreed to set up a task and finish group to look at how the affiliation fee is calculated. At the moment it's a pence per elector. If your electorate is above approx. 32,000, the NALC affiliation fee is capped.

NALC are also aiming to look to see if there is an alternative way to calculate affiliation fee rather than just electorate, because the electorate doesn't consider how wealthy that a council is. For this year certainly and going forward until it is changed for other reasons the decision was to use the CPI.

### **Mary Bradley Chair**

I'm just going to add into that because of the 5% increase last year was so controversial the pressure from the assembly was to try and control costs really well.

This year NALC has restructured all its staffing and several other things to try and save money, because rightly it needs to live within its means.

### **Sue Castle-Clarke Ousby PC**

The reason I ask this is because I know for a lot of our members this energises their debates about finance and budgets because we're all aware that NALC sold a large property in in Russell Street, London and has over £1,000,000 invested for which it gets a significant annual amount of interest. So councils are curious as to why NALC feels it must keep putting up its affiliation fees on a straight line trajectory rather than thinking about its needs. But Mary, you have just commented that you know that they are looking internally how to contain their costs, which is a good move.

### **Mary Bradley Chair**

The money that was raised from the sale of Russell Street is ring fenced money that has to be used for capital investment but they do use some of the interest on it to actually do things such as employing the lobbying company who actually work within Parliament.

Raising the affiliation fee this year was a unanimous decision.

### **Jonathan Davies Clifton PC**

Annually NALC sends out the recommended pay increases for clerks that has been agreed as part of the wider local government pay package agreements. I'm aware in Cumbria after the recent send out of the last pay increase recommendations, it caused a number of issues for some parish councils in that their clerks sent out updates that this was a statutory increase rather than it being the recommendation that comes from NALC and I'm just wondering whether there's some need for NALC to look at its policy on how it actually sends out these recommendations in association with SLCC so that it is clear that it is down to Town and Parish councils to make the decisions because it is being interpreted by some that has it has to happen rather than it being a recommendation. I think it is down to the wording that NALC needs to look at through policy, with regards to how it makes those recommendations to member councils.

### **Peter Allison**

It does not come from NALC. In fact, NALC does not even have a seat on the board of the body that makes the recommendations. This is a negotiation across the local government

sector between employers and unions and on a national basis and NALC makes that information available with the general recommendation that councils should follow the National Joint Council terms and conditions.

**Jonathan Davies Clifton PC**

But the wording on the NALC letter was not very clear about it being a recommendation for Town and Parish councils to consider implementing. So I'm just wondering whether NALC should be looking at making it much clearer as part of a policy for the organization that when it's sending out these communications, it is made clear that you know it is still down to councils to make the decisions rather than it being NALC sending this and you must implement it. Even though NALC doesn't set the levels, NALC is the one that's communicating this information to town and parish councils in association, I appreciate with the SLCC.

**Mary Bradley Chair**

I think the issue is that whether or not you're employed on the terms and conditions in the 1st place.

**Peter Allison**

And you know the NALC recommended employment contract makes it clear that that not only is the salary, but all the other terms are linked to the National Joint Council conditions.

**Sonia Hutchinson CO**

I think our issue this year, Peter, was that some clerks didn't even put it in front of their council. They themselves made the decision that they were entitled to the increase as it was in their contract, so they just paid it when everything should still go before a full council for that council to make its resolution to pay its clerk the annual pay award.

**Peter Allison**

Fair enough.

**Sue Castle-Clarke Ousby PC**

This is a negotiated settlement between the National Joint Council, trade unions and government representatives. It all depends on the wording of the employment contract with your clerk as to whether they are on what's called Green Book terms and conditions. Some councils in Cumbria still do not have perhaps the most correct contracts of employment with their Clerk of the council and that has led to a lot of confusion. But I would support what Jonathan says because even my own parish council, the Clerk assumed the wording of the letter from NALC that listed all the spinal column point increases meant that it was immediately applicable and she didn't have to come to the parish council for authorisation to implement it. So there is confusion and words are important. Jonathan's got a point.

### **Mary Bradley Chair**

We can take that back to the NALC management board who are looking at these sorts of issues.

### **End of Q&A session**

Mary then said a very big thank you to Peter for coming virtually over to Cumbria today. Stating that some very interesting points had been raised that will be taken back to NALC and looked at locally by CALC.

Mary then thanked everybody for attending a very interesting morning, the directors who work tirelessly for CALC and also of course the staff who turn out continually, work very flexibly and give the councils a good service.

Mary then gave a very big thank you to all the parish councillors and the clerks who also do a sterling job throughout the year.

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