



National Association of Councillors Northern Ireland Region Members' Newsletter September 2020

The NAC Executive Committee has resumed monthly meetings by using Zoom for the July and August meetings. For the September meeting we have arranged to meet in person, whilst operating within the government guidelines for social distancing. If this goes according to plan the meeting will take place on Monday 7 September 2020 at The Guildhall, Derry/Londonderry.

We had our first Zoom Members' Meeting during August and, despite a few minor teething problems, many of our members joined and welcomed the opportunity to receive feedback on the NAC's actions, take part in the discussions, and share details on how our various councils are currently operating under the challenges of the COVID-19 restrictions.



The NAC Annual General Meeting is scheduled for Friday 2 October 2020 and we are working through the practicalities as to whether this can take place in our chosen venue of the Glenavon House Hotel in Cookstown, as it has done in the past few years. We will inform members when this is confirmed.

COUNCILLOR EQUALITY

We wrote to the recently appointed Acting Deputy Secretary of the DfC, Mr Mark O'Donnell in July to inform him of pending matters that have been addressed with his office in relation to the Councillors Code of Conduct and Councillor Equality. We were informed that Mr O'Donnell was on leave but on his return these matters will be raised, and a full response provided. Two follow-up letters have now been sent.

CODE OF CONDUCT UPDATE

In February the DfC Minister, Deirdre Hargey MLA informed the NAC that she is considering responses in relation to the consultation on the review of the Councillors Code and that following consideration and approval she expects to be able to initiate the Assembly resolution process in due course. As Ms Hargey is currently off due to illness, we have also raised this matter with the Acting Secretary for the DfC, Mr Mark O'Donnell.



Solace Meeting

We received an update on the Actions from our meeting on 17 January, in this we were advised as follows: -

Code of Conduct review, DfC Dispensations and Declarations of Interest – Solace stated they have written to the Minister and would raise this at a meeting with the DfC, they said an update on this will be provided at the earliest opportunity.

Councillor Equality and Welfare Officer provision for Councillors – “Each Council would look at this individually and provide their Elected Members with an update”.

LGTG

The Local Government Training Group (LGTG) meeting which was scheduled to take place on 22 April 2020 was cancelled due to COVID-19, however we have recently been invited to take part in the consultation process and we will keep members updated on this.

New Ombudsman

Since our last meeting, a new NI Public Services Ombudsman has been appointed. Margaret Kelly took up the post during August 2020.

Following a meeting with Mr Paul McFadden (the then deputy and acting Ombudsman) and his colleague Mrs McAleer, they had offered to come along to talk to our members to explain their office processes and answer any questions, however this was delayed due to the COVID-19 Pandemic.

We hope to have the opportunity to meet with Ms Kelly when she is settled into her new role.

DfC Partnership Panel

The NAC Secretary, Cllr Joe Boyle, wrote to the Minister Carál Ní Chuilín on 11/08/20 asking that the NAC Executive Committee have representation on the reconvened Partnership Panel.

Bereavements

MAGS MURRAY, LAMA

The NAC received the sad news that Mags Murray, the ex-chair of LAMA had passed away on 13 June.

A message from the NAC was posted in the on-line book of condolence that was set up by Fingal County Council, and a sympathy card was sent on behalf of the NAC to Mag's family.

JOHN HUME

The NAC Committee members expressed their sadness on hearing of the death of the former SDLP Leader John Hume at their meeting on 3 August.

A message of condolence was posted in the on-line book of condolence arranged by Derry & Strabane District Council, and a sympathy card was also sent on behalf of the NAC to the SDLP Headquarters with a request for it to be passed on to Mr Hume's family.

If you have any problem or query relating to your work as a councillor, please do not hesitate to get in touch with us.