



SALC Representative's Report.

1. Since my report to the November meeting of Full Council, I have attended a SALC meeting with senior Suffolk County Council members and officers to discuss public transport issues on 5th December, of the SALC Suffolk Coastal Area Committee on 9th December, and of the SALC Executive Committee on 19th December. The Local Associations Information Service (LAIS), produced by SALC for county associations throughout England, has continued to provide briefing notes on actual and impending legislative and regulatory changes which affect town & parish councils.
2. Area Committee.
Minutes of the meeting on 9th December have yet to be published. The keynotes were a presentation on the evolving Suffolk County Council Budget for 2014/15, followed two contrasting presentations by area chairman Ron Bailey & Professor John Midwinter on Nuclear Power & Renewable Energy. Copies can be provided on request. The next meeting is on Monday 17th March at the Riverside Centre, Stratford St. Andrew starting at 19:00.
3. Meeting with SCC Members & Officers.
This was a useful meeting at which we discovered that an SCC member working group had been established to review passenger transport policy. We discussed a wide range of issues and agreed details of the forthcoming joint SALC-SCC public transport conference.
4. Executive Committee.
In the absence of the Coastal Area Committee chairman, I was called upon at short notice to attend a meeting of the SALC Executive Committee on 19th December. In a new departure, it was agreed that a summary report of Executive Committee meetings (excluding confidential matters) would be published. A copy is attached as Appendix 1 to this report.
5. Board.
I will be attending the next meeting of the SALC Board on 23rd January.
6. Local Associations Information Service.
Those published since the November meeting have been:-
 - 1360 on new Model Standing Orders produced by the National Association, and
 - 1361 on recent developments *re* local government finance and council tax precept.
7. Local Government Finance and Council Tax Precept.
Government announcements on the local government financial settlement for 2014/15 have been even latter than usual this year. The National Association sent two detailed eMails to county associations on 18th and 20th December. Councillors' attention is drawn to the highlighted sections relating to the Council Tax Support Funding provided by government to

district councils and the Council Tax Referendum Threshold principles. At this meeting of Full Council is considering both the precept and the budget for 2014/15, copies of the NALC correspondence are attached as Appendix 2 to this report.

8. It is **recommended that:-**

- a. the contents of this report be noted; and
- b. a letter be sent to Suffolk Coastal District Council make representations for the Council Tax Support Funding grant to be passed on to parishes *in full*.

Cllr. Geof Butterwick
Chairman, MPC Planning & Transport Committee
Member, SALC Board and Planning Working Group
7th January 2014



Executive Committee 19th December 2013

Summary Note

1. A summary report of the Executive meetings, excluding confidential matters, will be published on the SALC website so that the Board and local councils could access information prior to the formal reporting rounds.
2. The minutes of the meeting of 10 October 2013 were approved as an accurate record.
3. Changes had been made to secure an overall surplus of £1,451, against a budgeted deficit of £5,353 owing to income generation and staff cost reductions etc. The future of external funding remains uncertain.
4. Alternative banks are being considered for SALC funds.
5. The CEO has written to the Suffolk Localism Working Group about the lack of information and involvement of local councils in developing policies for implementing the Community Infrastructure Levy. The lack of clarity regarding whether and when local councils will receive the CIL is acting as a barrier to some progressing neighbourhood plans. SALC will write to all district councils, Nick Bowles MP and Suffolk MPs outlining concerns.
6. SALC had attended a meeting with SCC to discuss arrangements for a Public Transport Seminar which aimed to provide joint solutions to the challenges within a rural and reducing budget context.
7. The Planning working group will be renamed Planning and Transport working group.
8. An announcement had been made by Brandon Lewis MP that council tax referendum threshold principles will be announced in the New Year and that Government expects billing authorities to pass on support to local councils to help mitigate any reduction in their tax base due to the local council tax support scheme. This information will be circulated to the SALC Board and all clerks.
9. SALC had met with other Associations and was pursuing supporting councils with various proposals under the Sustainable Communities Act including:
 - The removal of the automatic precept provision from the Localism Act4
 - The right for local councils to appeal planning decisions
 - The right for local councils to trade in electricity from renewable energy sources to benefit communities
10. Work was being undertaken with the sponsors, to increase the profile of Village of the Year, Newsletter of the Year and the new SALC Awards.
11. SALC had attended the NALC AGM and had helped ensure that non-constitutional motions could once again be put to the AGM (rather than NALC Policy Committee).

12. NALC is recruiting a new CEO.
13. NALC is writing to MEPs about the potential changes to VAT on village halls.
14. NALC is pressing Government for clarity about future audit arrangements for local councils.
15. A list of local councils with qualified audits has been published. SALC will issue advice about this and how to avoid problems with audits and introduce proper safeguards for public money.
16. SALC's motion on VAT reclaim for parish meetings, adopted at the SALC AGM, has been passed to NALC and will be considered on 4 February 2014.
17. SALC is exceeding its internal targets in relation to membership levels, providing new training and services and sourcing external funds etc.
18. SALC will issue advice to councils on using Facebook and Twitter as problems had been experienced.
19. The SALC AGM had received good feedback and would follow a similar format next year with ideas for speakers being welcomed.
20. Additional area Meetings concerns :
 - A council's concerns about a street lighting estimate are being pursued with Suffolk County Council (SCC).
 - SALC will be producing guidance on the Sustainable Communities Act.
 - There are major concerns about mobile coverage which are being taken up with decision-makers by SALC.
 - There had been some difficulty pinpointing specific action on affordable housing that could be taken to address the lack of provision.
 - Neighbourhood plan concerns would be taken up by SALC as it was felt plans should not be delayed owing to Local Plan documents remaining in flux.
 - SALC will raise with SCC the desire of a council to have the power to remove advertising signs from the roadside.
21. A report was circulated prior to the meeting and was noted. Breaking New Ground is the successor body and governance arrangements are being put in place.
22. SALC had attended the East Suffolk Partnership forum. It was noted that the ESP is an enabling body for strategic purposes e.g. potentially providing funding to village halls where they provide opportunities for exercise.
23. SALC is considering a submission on the draft Deregulation Bill which proposes to permit gating of by-ways.

From: Justin Griggs [<mailto:justin.griggs@nalc.gov.uk>]
Sent: 20 December 2013 18:30
To: Justin Griggs
Subject: DCLG Local Government Finance Statement (2)
Importance: High

County officer colleagues,

I promised to get back to you on next steps and further action on the local government finance statement.

Council tax support funding

For those of you who are still experiencing difficulties with your billing authority/authorities, you should consider continuing to make representations for the grant to be passed on to parishes.

To help with this I would draw to your attention the statement made by the Minister and the supporting information on spending power.

As you know the sector has been pressing Government to:

- reiterate the expectation funding is passed on in full to parish councils: the Ministers statement goes some way to meeting this objective;
- clearly identify the parish council support grant for each billing authority, as was the case in the current financial year: despite saying previously the grant would not be identified next year, the information provided by Minister appears to have done this.

On the latter issue the relevant information can be found in the Spending power 2014 to 2015 supporting information at <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/change-in-spending-power>

Use the bottom tabs to open Summary LA- 14-15 and look at column AI. You may wish to use this information in your dealings with your billing authority/authorities!

Please let us know if your billing authority/authorities is still refusing to pass on any grant funding to parishes. We will be able to feed this in to our own representations. I would also urge you and councils to write to your MP and to the Minister to ensure they are fully aware of the local situation and the impact of localised council tax arrangements.

Council tax referendums

While the statement that Government will announce council tax referendum threshold principles separately in the New Year is unhelpful and does not provide any clarity or certainty - given the late stage of council budget setting - it does give us more time to continue our representations.

I would again encourage you to write to your MP and the Minister to explain and tell the story of any likely increases next year, setting out reasons for the rise, projected costs of the referendum, and any impact a cap would have. As Parliament will have the opportunity to debate and vote on the Settlement in due course it is imperative MPs are alert to the concerns of parishes and the sector.

Consultation process

The consultation on the settlement closes on 15 January 2014 and I would encourage county association colleagues to respond, setting out the specific circumstances and challenges in your area.

You may already have seen this week's LGC story on parish referendums, if not the weblink is below: www.lgcplus.com/news/parish-referendum-could-end-localism/5066538.article?blocktitle=More-news-from-Local-Government-Chronicle&contentID=2252

Local media are running quite a lot of stories at the moment on council tax support funding and you may want to consider using the media to help get your message across.

The Chairman will be meeting the Minister again in the New Year to continue to make the case for the sector and highlight the impact of local government finance policy on our councils and communities.

Do feel free to give me a call to discuss anything or to talk anything through.

Warm regards,
Justin

From: Justin Griggs
Sent: Wednesday, December 18, 2013 06:06 PM
To: Justin Griggs
Subject: DCLG Local Government Finance Statement

County officer colleagues,

A written statement on local government finance was today made by Brandon Lewis MP, Parliamentary Under Secretary of State, Communities and Local Government.

In summary the Government have stated they:

- will announce the council tax referendum threshold principles separately in the New Year;
- expect billing authorities to carry on passing on support to town councils and parishes to help mitigate any reduction in their taxbase due to the local council tax support scheme.-

Please find attached the statement in full (pdf document), relevant extracts are also set out below:

- Keeping council tax down for hard-working people
- We expect local authorities to protect taxpayers and help bear down on the cost of living. That is why we have provided up to £550 million of extra funding to local authorities so they can freeze council tax for the next two years. This means we have provided an unprecedented five years of freeze funding worth potentially up to £1,100 for an average Band D taxpayer over the lifetime of Parliament.
- From April 2014, funding for 2011-12 and 2013-14 freezes is now in the main local government settlement total for future years. I can also announce that the Secretary of State has agreed with the Chancellor that the funding for the next two freeze years will also be built into the spending review baseline. We hope this will give maximum possible certainty for councils that the extra funding for freezing council tax will remain available, and there will not be a 'cliff edge' effect from the freeze grant disappearing in due course. We have done our part – we now expect councils to do theirs in helping hard-working people with the cost of living.
- We will announce the council tax referendum threshold principles separately in the New Year. We are particularly open to representations suggesting that some lower threshold be applied to all or some categories of authorities, given the strong need to protect taxpayers wherever possible from unreasonable increases in bills, and given next year's elections on 22 May across the country allow for referendums to be held at minimal cost. We should trust the people.
- The final referendum principles will then be subject to the approval of the House of Commons. In addition, subject to approval by Parliament of the Local Audit and Accountability Bill, which is currently before Parliament, the principles will include levies and will therefore be based on the level of Band D council tax. This will mean the principle will relate to the actual increase which appears on people's bills – again reducing costs for taxpayers.
- Parish councils and local council tax support: We have also set out previously that there is some £3.3 billion in the settlement this year for Council Tax support schemes. There is an element within this national pot that is there specifically to reflect reductions in the parish tax base. We have not separately identified the money because it is not ring-fenced and as caseloads change and schemes evolve, the amount that different parishes need will change. It would be wrong to try to manage that centrally. But we have been clear that we expect billing authorities to carry on passing on support to town councils and parishes to help mitigate any reduction in their taxbase due to the local council tax support scheme.
- Consultation process: Today marks the start of a period of statutory consultation with local government on the settlement and I welcome their responses. Consultation closes on 15 January 2014. I shall be making available full supporting information online at: www.gov.uk/government/collections/provisional-local-government-finance-settlement-england-2014-to-2015
- I have placed copies of the consultation paper and supporting information in the Vote Office and the Library of the House. The House will have the opportunity to debate and vote on the Settlement in due course.

We are considering next steps and further action the sector at all levels needs to take in light of today's statement.

I will be in touch with you again by the end of the week. Please don't hesitate to contact me in the meantime.

Warm regards,
Justin