

NALC Conference 2018

Attendees: Ian Graham, Neil Coleby, Amanda Frost, Alan Green, Peter Knight, Shona Bendix and Lauren Elliott.

Stalls attended and information collected. Good contacts made on energy saving, facilities, waste management, insurance, technology and more.

Sue Baxter (Chair) and Jonathan Owen (CEO) gave an intro for NALC. Lots of age-old themes that get talked about among local councils: challenging time for local councils and local government, whether training for councillors should be mandatory, thinking about how to get people to stand for election. whether the name 'Council' is off-putting for public engagement etc.

Mayor James Palmer from Milton Keynes gave an insight into Cambridgeshire and Peterborough. He talked about 'his' parish councils and his personal ambitions whilst also talking about the importance of grass-roots upwards democracy.

There was a bland statement from Lord Gary Porter who failed to attend.

Andrew Gwynne MP spoke about Labour's promises including no precept referenda. He was asked about various policies and positions including the party's failure to support a new parish in Corby.

Rishi Sunak MP talked about a digital innovation fund (which it transpires is no longer available). He was asked about various issues, such as whether he could address the costs associated with individual data protection registrations for councillors.

Male, pale and stale

A flawed NALC survey on diversity was discussed. The survey only interviewed existing councillors about their perception of why people did not stand for office and some of the reported data was not fully explained. A full report will be published in due course and they intend to publish a Good Councillors Guide to Engagement.

Good (and heated) debate with some defensive about the idea of diversify and others fully embracing and keen to explore policies which provide a better framework for diversity. Quite a lot of discussion about unconscious bias and whether chairing positions tended to be taken up by male, stale and pale people.

NALC is working with Community Organisers to train local councils in how to engage. Details taken.

Resource for elections: www.nalc.gov.uk/our-work/elections - it has very little at this link but we have enough internal resource and knowledge to support the Council and the local public.

Funding

Falmouth talked about their funding including how they worked with the Coastal Communities Fund. Much emphasis on comforting funders with creating a good partnership of local organisations.

Big Lottery Fund talked about its role as the largest community funder in the UK. They remain keen on 'meaningful' partnerships.

Case studies given but there is lots of information on their good website and they have helpful advisers.

The Good Exchange talked about ways to use software to create a network matching community, local and national organisations, funders and applicants together to focus funding solutions: www.thegoodexchange.com. They say they save time on making applications.

Workshop - Harnessing local knowledge

Government and top tier council have a comprehensive map resources such as Ordnance Survey, Aerial and satellite mapping, legal data. They have high budgets and the advantages of scale. But local council have all the detailed local knowledge. They know about covenants, opinions, future plans, site history. They are ideally placed to provide real time information as maps change. But the budgets are not high.

As a result, there is an initiative to make map resources available for free to local councils and their subcontractors, to improve their operations. There is also an initiative to share mapping information across councils and government. This potentially allows government, county, district and local government to work cooperatively on joint projects.

At a town council level, this can help us with asset management, park planning, room booking, and has great potential in designing town walks.

PSMA - Public Sector Mapping Agreement. Gives access to OS mapping and other layers. <https://www.ordnancesurvey.co.uk/business-and-government/public-sector/mapping-agreements/public-sector-mapping-agreement.html> This is free to local councils - we should sign up.

APGB - Aerial photography GB. Open access aerial mapping. <https://www.apgb.co.uk>
<https://www.parish-online.co.uk/news/96-understanding-the-new-apgb-aerial-photography-agreement>

Parish Online - web based mapping service. This could also be used for community engagement, giving the public the ability to add to or amend council maps in a controlled manner. <https://www.parish-online.co.uk>

Pear Technology - windows application based service. Consultancy based approach that can help with digitising paper mapping or integrating old data sets. <http://www.peartechnology.co.uk>

Pear Technology and Parish Online have a data sharing agreement.

I also saw mention of GeoXphere who are active in this area <https://geosphere.com>

Key takeaway from this is that Lowestoft Town Council has free and low cost access to government quality mapping for its assets and boundaries, which could help hugely with asset planning/management, local plan and events management. It could also be an opportunity for public engagement through friends groups. For example, tree surveys, reporting issues, designing walks or trails. Mapping might also help with building management, at Hamilton House, museums or possibly the Town Hall.

From further discussions with Parish Online representatives, it was clear that we could also use free services like Google Maps for cartographic data entry at the start, and migrate later with their assistance should we wish to do so.

Workshop - Male pale and stale

Described one persons journey as they joined a town council. Flagged the importance of publicising how to become a town councillor, in order to encourage underrepresented sections of the

population to have a voice. I didn't find this session particularly informative, but the clear message is that councils and political groups should inform the general public about what a council does, what a councillor does, and how to stand.

Workshop - United against dementia

Highlighted the case for working with Dementia UK. What local councils can do to assist dementia sufferers. Highlighted acting as a coordinator between charities (Dementia UK), care providers, emergency services and the community. I asked if town councils were in the best place to act here, considering Dementia UK and health care providers would be in the best place to know who was at risk, and emergency services and policing are in the best place to provide safeguarding to the vulnerable. The general response I got was that the town council could act as a contact point for services.

Workshop - Engaging with your community

Very interesting workshop on how to engage with large portions of the electorate rather than just lobby groups. Description of the events of Glastonbury council, who got survey returns of 2/3 of electorate when the last bank threatened closure in the town. As a result of those events, the issue was raised as far as Prime Ministers questions. Although the bank did close, another bank took over on the side, and Glastonbury has a local bank again.

What was particularly mentioned was that lobby groups do not always represent the opinion of the populous, and community engagement is a way of delivering the true majority desires of the population.

Community Organisers Ltd are offering free 1-day workshops, and I think this is something that would really benefit Lowestoft and the council. <https://www.corganisers.org.uk>

Embracing GDPR

Quite a rushed session and was taken over by Clerks and Councillors asking questions relating to their individual Councils. Some controversy when it was said that Councillors should be registered as Data Controllers in their own right when undertaking constituent casework and are responsible for paying the associated £40 fee themselves. Councillors only have to register once and this will cover all the organisations they represent. Personal data breaches must be reported to the ICO within 72 hours. Everyone was reminded that personal data should not be kept longer than is necessary.

Male, Pale and Stale

Presentation from a young female Councillor who told her story of becoming a Councillor and how relatively simple she found the process. Focussed on what is stopping people becoming Councillors and whether Councils are representative of the communities they serve. Other Councils have organised open evenings to give more information on how to become a Councillor, what the role involves and common misconceptions about the role. Some Councils provide a Carer's Allowance and some provide an allowance for all Councillors which they can choose to take if they wish.

Engaging With Your Community

Interesting and thought provoking session on how other Councils have engaged with their communities via Community Organisers. This has involved door to door engagement to ask people how they feel about their community and empowering them to make change. The importance of

listening to feedback from the community was stressed, rather than assuming, or basing decisions on the one or two members of the public who may have been present at one of the meetings.

Cyber Crime

A mostly common sense presentation detailing the various attacks which a Council may be subject to, including ransomware and phishing. There was an emphasis on ensuring appropriate training has been given on how to spot a suspicious email and what to do in the event of an attack. Fines for data breaches due to negligence have increased significantly since GDPR came into force.

There was an interactive session with representatives from external organisations on the perception of local councils and what their role should be in the future. It was commented that perceptions can vary due to a lack of awareness of what Town Councils do, and that Town Councils are being handed more responsibilities without the necessary resources to deal with them. It was suggested that party politics should be abolished in local councils and the voting age should be lowered to engage more young people.