

RALC LGR Working Group MINUTES
Friday 6th February 2026 at 11:00

Present: Martin Griffiths, Keith Robertson, Sue Prochak, John Barnes, Mary Philo, David Penfold, David Todd, Nigel Jacklin, Jenner Sands, Alice Nolan, Paul Redstone, Kay Moss, Cathryn Gallagher and Vicki Rutt.

1. Apologies for absence and introductions

Apologies were received from Lorna Ford.

2. To discuss the Neighbourhood Area Committees

Keith explained his proposal for Neighbourhood Area Committees (NACs).

NAC's have been set up within the UK by authorities transferring to a Unitary with varying degrees of success. Problems have been found in the administration of the NAC's because with a ratio of about 50,000 residents to each NAC area the number of NAC's becomes too cumbersome to manage by the unitary. If we take Rother District as an example, using the 50,000:1 ratio there would be 2 NAC's. Given that Bexhill is 50% of the population of Rother that would presumably be one NAC for Bexhill and one for everyone else. For East Sussex that would require 7+ NAC's excluding the current Boroughs. That is a significant admin load on the unitary.

An alternative to stand alone NAC's is a local government structure already exists that does have governance in place and is elected, which is Parish and Town Councils. These Councils then meet to discuss and act on key local issues in associations at District level, County level and onward to National level. The governance of the District and County Associations is not as rigorous as with Parish and Town Councils but could be improved quickly. This structure provides a similar function to that proposed of the NAC's but with checks and balances in place already.

It would be relatively easy to enhance the terms of reference for Parish and Town Councils and Associations to ensure that local groups and all the relevant service providers were included and required to address priorities identified at a local level, when needed, at a frequency needed.

Advantage of this approach are:

- Does not replicate but uses an existing structure with local knowledge and good governance to reach the goals indicated for NAC's in the Govt white paper.
- Enhances the role of Parish and Town Councils and its links via the Associations to the Unitary decision makers.
- Increases transparency and audit trail of actions from identifying local priorities to actions by the unitary, using consistent and appropriate governance and process.
- Reduces the admin burden on the Primary who are far removed from local levels to properly understand or apply this in a local context.
- Enables a tiered and County wide approach to address local and common agendas using a defined and consistent approach.
- A raising of engagement and of standards of competence and effectiveness at all levels.
- Avoids single issue groups dominating agendas in NAC's.
- This a scalable approach across Counties.

What is needed to implement this:

- District & County Associations need to have a defined level of competence and auditable governance, similar to Parish and Town Councils.
- A change to the constitutions and terms of reference for District & County Associations to enable them to manage the additional work intended of NACs.
- Some funding from the Primary to professionalise the administrations and competence of associations.

A discussion was held regarding the proposal, and the following points were made:

- NAC's need to connect locally.
- There is a concern that a larger authority is less knowledgeable as Parish Councils who have more local knowledge and the electors' views.
- A NAC would be good for influencing policy structure.
- Need to set a minimum size. The size of the NAC needs to fit the community.
- The NAC will need to fit into the scrutiny process.
- Voting was discussed and Alice will look into how voting works on a NAC. **Action.**
- NAC's that have been set up are more like networking events and they then create an action plan. We need to work out what they should be delivering and then who will need to be in the room.
- We need clarity on where their recommendations and actions go to. Alice will look into this. **Action.**
- Following an earlier discussing about the scrutiny process, Paul will find the ESCC Scrutiny constitution and send to Vicki. *This has been circulated.*
- The Government white paper said there would be no immediate changes to boundaries, therefore the structure needs to focus on current boundaries.
- NAC needs to be a good information gathering group and also a way of implementing change by having a vote.
- Concerns raised that those who sit on the NAC's are not going to be elected members.
- With the current District Associations, every Parish and Town Council are able to send a representative. With the NAC, this will not be possible, how can others have their voices heard.
- Planning was discussed as the topic that is mostly liaised between Parish and District.
- The existing NAC's that Alice have reviewed so far meet to set priority areas, to review how they can improve outcomes, so it is very strategic.
- Keith has liaised with the Rother Clerks Chair; Clerks are worried about losing their voice and their contacts which will make their working lives very hard.
- Paul said that we need to understand hierarchy. Regarding planning, Parish and Town Councils are consulted but do not decide. Look at the different level of functions to look at the decisions. Make it easier for residents to know who to go to for issues so need to keep it simple and within the structure we currently have for eSALC and RALC.

It was agreed that the basic structure that Keith has suggested appeals to all and should be looked into further. It was agreed we need to know what the purpose and remit would be of the NAC. It was agreed to use this time to make it better than it is at the moment. We must not lose the lobbying function that eSALC do at the moment.

It was confirmed that this working group reports to all RALC members so they will receive this information. Martin and Keith are going to look at drafting a formal proposal to go to the next RALC meeting in April that can then be disseminated to Parish and Town Council for their views.

Action.

3. Date of next meeting:

Friday 27th March 2026, 11:30 – 13:00 in the Committee Room. *Somerset Council joining online.*

Meeting ended at 12:25