

NATIONAL ASSEMBLY | AGENDA

Tuesday 24 March 2026

10.00 – 13.00 online

To submit an apology for this meeting please email nalccommittees@nalc.gov.uk or call 020 7637 1865.

1. Welcome and apologies for absence
 - 1.1. To note any apologies received and changes in representation. New members are invited to introduce themselves.
2. Minutes of the previous meeting and matters arising
 - 2.1. To approve [draft minutes](#) of the meeting held on 24 February 2026.

(If members have comments on the accuracy of the draft minutes or notes, please contact nalccommittees@nalc.gov.uk before the meeting).
3. Parliamentary Reception and Star Councils Awards
 - 3.1. To note and provide feedback on NALC's Parliamentary Reception and [Star Councils Awards presentations](#) held on 24 February 2026 in the House of Lords.
4. Committee updates
 - 4.1. To receive updates from the national chair, vice chair (member services) and vice chair (finance and resources) (Appendix 4.1)
 - 4.2. To receive updates from NALC standing committees. (Appendix 4.2)
 - 4.2.1. Policy Committee
 - 4.2.2. Larger Councils' Committee
 - 4.2.3. Smaller Councils' Committee
 - 4.2.4. Scrutiny Committee
 - 4.2.5. Management Board

5. Strategic review

5.1. To receive an update on progress on the strategic review of NALC and county associations. (Appendix 5.1)

6. New NALC advocacy toolkit

6.1. To receive a briefing on NALC's new 'Engaging Parliament Toolkit' for county associations and parish and town councils which has been produced in association with Connect Public Affairs.

7. Next meetings

7.1. Tuesday 30 June 2026 (in person in London)

7.2. Tuesday 29 September 2026 (online)

7.3. Tuesday 15 December 2026 (online)

APPENDIX 4.1 | NATIONAL ASSEMBLY | 24 MARCH 2026

Chair and vice chair report

1. Report from Cllr Iain Hamilton, chair

In January I was invited to attend the annual meeting of the County Officers Forum, and it was a pleasure to meet with the outgoing chair, Chris Wayman (Worcestershire) and the opportunity to welcome the incoming chair Mel Woof (Buckinghamshire and Milton Keynes) and secretary Charmaine Keatley (Kent). I am looking forward to continuing our engagement with county officers to strengthen our collaborative approach to supporting our sector.

February was a very busy period which commenced with giving oral evidence to the Public Administration and Constitutional Affairs Committee in which I reiterated NALC's position on improving standards in public life to ensure that our views were effectively relayed to the committee along with other witnesses such as the LGA.

I was pleased to attend the 100 Year Campaign to Protect Rural England Reception in Parliament on behalf of NALC and hear about all their fantastic work and interesting views on the future of rural areas. I also attended my first Rural Coalition Meeting which was very enlightening and I am looking forward to future meetings where the Minister of State for Food Security and Rural Affairs, the Rt Hon Dame Angela Eagle will be in attendance.

Following the National Assembly meeting in February, along with colleagues I attended the Parliamentary Reception and Star Council Awards which was incredibly well attended, and I had the pleasure of meeting with MPs, Peers and representatives from many partner organisations. The Star Council awards are a fabulous opportunity for our sector to celebrate those that work within our sector and I congratulate every nominee and winner on the day. I want to thank our staff for the incredible work they put into ensuring the event is the success it was. I would also like to thank all the members of the National Assembly for their attendance and for helping to make it a day to remember.

I attended the latest meeting of NALC's Westminster Forum to join the discussion around the next stages of the English Devolution and Community Empowerment Bill. I also had the opportunity to meet our fantastic president Baroness Scott of Needham Market, vice presidents and other advocates for our sector in Parliament.

I also held an introductory meeting with Miatta Fahnbulleh MP, the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State at the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) and discussed an array of issues and matters of importance for our sector, drawing particular attention to us having more involvement in LGR, on properly funding our sector and sector engagement in general across local government and ensuring that we work in partnership to ensure our sector can continue to grow and be a vital and strong voice for the communities that we represent. Other engagement with the government ministers includes writing to MHCLG with our latest submissions on Local Government Reorganisation and to the Treasury and other departments on the motion agreed at our Annual General Meeting on Net Zero and Nationally Significant Infrastructure Projects.

2. Report from Cllr David Francis, vice chair (member services)

- 1) Staff team: following an open recruitment process, which attracted a vast field of applicants, I am pleased to confirm that we have now made an appointment to the Head of Member Services role. Full details of our staff structure and responsibilities will be made available soon.
- 2) Annual reporting: we are fast approaching the end of the financial year. All local councils will need to ensure that they have put in place the relevant measures to enable a positive response to the new 'Assertion 10' in the AGAR (Annual Governance and Accountancy Return). Among other things, this requires each council to have a 'main contact' email address on a domain which they manage (ie not for example a gmail or btinternet one). To satisfy the requirement for an IT policy, a model is available on the National ALC website for those councils that supply their staff and members with all of the IT equipment. For those councils where staff and members supply their own equipment, the model in the Proper Practices Guide can be adapted.
- 3) Electronic AGAR: work has started on the production of an electronic version of the AGAR, a pilot trial of which is planned for later this year. This should greatly ease the reporting system for the c8500 local councils in England, as well as enabling some statistical analysis of councils' finances and property.
- 4) Review of the Proper Practices Guide: work is progressing well, to re-draft the governance and accountability proper practices guide. A recent consultation by the SAPPP (Smaller Authorities Proper Practices Panel) has revealed widespread support for councils to adopt more-informative formats for showing their annual accounts. There is also support for improvements to make the internal audit system more robust. The challenge now is to develop a regime which can bring internal auditors to an appropriate level of knowledge and skill, which is proportionate to the size of each council's budget.

- 5) Standards: I am a member of a small Task and Finish Group which is convened by the Ministry to develop the detail of a new and improved regime to promote and uphold standards of behaviour among councillors. We have been looking at the role and composition of Standards Committees, complaints and appeals processes, guidance and support, reporting, and sanctions. We are now hoping that the Government makes Parliamentary time available very soon to produce the required legislation.
- 6) Heritage: many county associations were created 80 years ago, in 1946, as part of a strategy to forming the National Association in the following year. We hope to make available on our website some material about the heritage of local councils and our associations, and to encourage good archiving practice.
- 7) Civility and Respect: the production of a video has been commissioned, to promote the take-up by local councils of the Civility and Respect pledge.
- 8) Latest website statistics - 17/03/26
 - 10,511 individual account sign-ups.
 - 49% are clerks, 41% are councillors, and 10% are other council staff.
 - Ratio of councillor take up is growing, now at 41% compared to 33% in April 25.
 - 5,448 account sign-ups are from different councils.
 - 69% of member councils have at least one account sign-up.
 - Our goal is to reach 12,000 individual sign-ups, 2 year from launch (7/10/2026).
 - Breakdown of data by county is available and shared with county associations quarterly.

3. Report from Cllr Sue Baxter (vice chair (finance and resources))

- **2025/26 financial outturn**

The finance function are currently working to finalise the financial results for 2025/26 and prepare for the associated external audit. The results will be provided to the next meeting of the national assembly, along with the audited accounts.

The 2025/26 forecast results, based on the zero-based budgeting process undertaken last year, was noted by the national assembly at the meeting on 24 February as appendix 2.3.

- **Future year budgets**

At their away day on 23 February, management board agreed to move to a process of budget setting which is more activity based, as has been done for the 2025/26 reforecast and 2026/27 budget. At the same meeting management board endorsed usage of NALC's current strategic objectives in the preparation of the 2027/28 and 2028/29 draft budgets.

As was agreed by National Assembly at the meeting on 8 July 2025, the three-year budget strategy (2026/27 to 2028/29) will be based on the affiliation subscription pence per elector and cap increasing by the % increase in CPI as reported by the office for national statistics in the 12 months to June of the previous year. At their meeting on 23 February management board noted that this left little room for investment in new work unless there was reprioritisation, new funding streams or it was agreed to fund investment from reserves.

The newly introduced process for internal budget management continues in its development. The operational budget managers will be integral to the process of preparing the 2027/28 and 2028/29 draft budgets.

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Report from NALC's Standing Committees

Scrutiny Committee - Cllr Ian Cowling

The Committee received a detailed report of the Budgeting and Financial Reporting work that has been undertaken to support the 25/26 reporting and the 26/27 Budget. The 25/26 results and forecast outturn plus the 26/27 Budget will be reported to the National Assembly meeting.

The major item of work has been to prepare for the External Audit procurement. A sub-group has considered this with our Finance staff. A brief has been prepared and will initially be discussed with a variety of firms to determine whether they are interested in formally proposing for our audit. Subsequently up to five firms will be invited to tender. A recommendation will go to the 2026 AGM for the final decision.

Our work programme has been settled with the review of mileage expenses moved to the second quarter as this sits better with the HR review topics in that quarter.

Policy Committee - Cllr Peter Allison

The Committee has held one full meeting since the last Assembly. The Committee considered two motions from county associations. The first from the Gloucestershire Association concerned climate ethical pensions. The concern was that pension schemes were still investing in companies involved in the production of fossil fuels. If pension schemes did not divest these investments by 2030 it would be difficult for the UK to meet its Net Zero target by 2050. Councils were urged to lobby the Local Government Pension Scheme and other pension schemes on divestment from fossil fuel companies. The committee supported the principle and proposed that Management Board and Scrutiny Committee be asked to consider how this might be implemented. A second motion from the East Riding and Northern Lincolnshire Association requested a review of statutory consultation periods for parish councils on planning applications. The specific request was for the current 21-day consultation period to be extended to 28 days. The committee felt that in a climate where the government is trying to speed up the planning process this was extremely unlikely to be accepted. It was also reported that a number of councils had local schemes that allowed parish councils to request an extension on a case-by-case basis. These local extensions were

normally granted unless they prevented the local planning authority to consider applications within statutory guidelines. The benefits of having a local charter covering areas such as this was also supported as this can ensure that the democratic scrutiny role of parish councils in the planning process is supported.

The committee then debated how the AGM motion on Net Zero engagement from Lancashire could be moved forward. It was recognised that the motion covered both general policy positions, which would be pursued through our normal government engagement process and specific opportunities where local knowledge from local councils can offer significant efficiency gains. Local feedback from councils in Lancashire has identified efficiency opportunities for an offshore wind farm project in the Morecambe Bay and the NALC Policy team have assisted with engagement with the Government decision making process.

The committee received a presentation from the Local Government Boundary Commission for England on their Parishes project. As a result of the work being done on LGR the Commission wanted to establish a greater understanding of the town and parish sector.

An update was received on the progress of the English Devolution and Community Empowerment Bill, and the committee discussed the implications of the changes to the funding of neighbourhood planning.

Since the last Assembly the Committee has, as usual, been active between meetings. The biggest consultation undertaken over this period was a major review of the NPPF. This review involves probably the greatest change since the NPPF was established in 2012. Prior to starting our response NALC staff and the committee chair and vice chair hosted a roundtable of sector experts in order to inform our response. The committee held a special meeting to review the draft response with the final response submitted on March 10th. At the same time as the NPPF consultation the Government also published draft changes to the design planning policy guidance and we submitted a response. The other major consultation this year has been one on estate management. This was in response to CMA report on this subject and is an area where NALC has established policy positions. The consultation made it clear that the Government wishes to reduce the prevalence of estate management arrangements and is considering making adoption of highways and sewers mandatory. Our response focused upon the management of parks, open spaces and play areas where we argued that our sector should have the first option of taking over the management of these areas.

Smaller Councils Committee – Vanessa Lowe

The Smaller Councils Committee met via Teams on 20 January 2026, chaired by Vanessa Lowe.

The committee agreed its work plan for 2026-27, aligned with NALC's corporate priorities. Key focus areas include a toolkit on NALC policies suitable for smaller councils, sharing good practice case studies, environmental issues, planning matters, the Make a Change elections campaign, Assertion 10 compliance, the Micro Councils Network, and Civility and Respect.

The committee received a presentation from Megan McKibbin (MHCLG) on the government's response to its 2025 Standards consultation. John Anderson and Vanessa Lowe were appointed as the committee's representatives to the Martyn's Law Steering Group.

The Micro Councils Network was confirmed as continuing into 2026-27. The next meeting will be held in person in London on 14 April 2026.

Larger Councils Committee

The Larger Councils met firstly on Microsoft Teams on 15 December 2025.

Cllr Mike Drew was elected committee chair and Cllr Miranda Wixon elected committee vice chair.

The committee had a discussion about co-options and an initial discussion about its workplan for the next two years.

The committee met secondly on Microsoft Teams on 3 February 2026.

The committee agreed their workplan for 2026/2027. Points made during the discussion included that the creation of new mayoral strategic authorities could provide the opportunity for the largest local councils to deliver government funded programmes, the committee should consider campaigning to get more members signed up to the NALC website, the committee might want to co-op a trailblazer from a larger council in the Northeast or Northwest and community cohesion should be a priority.

Updates were provided on NALC's Study Tour to Taunton Town Council (now sold out) [NALC's 2026 Annual Conference](#) (tickets selling fast), NALC's devolution case studies (now published and available to view [here](#)), Martyn's Law and the Super Councils Network.

Shar Roselman was reappointed the Larger Councils Committee representative on the Martyn's Law Steering Group.

Management Board

Management Board met for a day of discussion before the last meeting of National Assembly on 23 February. This was a strategy session looking at proposed work priorities identified by the committees and NALC officers. Several priorities were identified, in addition to business as usual, which would be the focus of additional activity over the next two-years supported by additional resources and re-prioritisation as necessary.

Priority activities are:

- **Strategic Review:** Progress the review of NALC's strategy and relationship with county associations to meet the evolving needs of members and the changing local government landscape as well as responding to previous discussions about the county officers' forum **Thriving Together** initiative. Additional resources to support the review have been allocated and the review would be facilitated by Shared Intelligence. This priority will support the new chair's focus on stronger partnerships.
- **Local Government Reorganisation:** Build on the recent special National Assembly event with further sessions including on community governance reviews, clustering and asset transfer. Resources would be available on our website and a dedicated national network established. Sharing good practice between areas that had been through or were going through the process would be a focus. Parliamentary lobbying would continue, supported by an extension of the Connect Public Affairs contract (funded as necessary from reserves). **This priority will support the new chair's focus on stronger voices.** [The linked but separate issue of devolution would be addressed once there was clearer understanding of the establishment of new strategic authorities/mayors].
- **Stronger governance and standards in public life:** Continued lobbying for legislation introducing sanctions which when introduced will require parliamentary engagement supported by Connect Public Affairs. Supporting advice and guidance would also be necessary, along with engagement with key stakeholders such as LGA, ADSO and LLG. The **Smaller Authorities' Audit Appointments company** (set up by NALC) has agreed to provide additional resources to support investment in improving sector governance and the work of county associations. They have appointed a project manager to oversee the development of this project. **This priority will support the new chair's focus on stronger governance and stronger partnerships.**

- Enthusing/championing the sector and raising awareness of its potential: Programme to share good practice and learning through visits, website, Star Councils Awards, annual in person conference, in person study visit, monthly and ad-hoc online events, attendance at sector conferences such as LGA, LLG, ADSO and party conferences. This priority will support the new chair's focus on stronger voices, stronger governance and stronger partnerships.
- Training: A concerted drive to encourage take-up of training by councillors and develop greater consistency of approaches across the country, supported by national resources and guidance including the SAAA project identified above. This priority will support the new chair's focus on stronger governance.

Management Board also considered the following matters

- a) Noted the current representation on outside bodies and appointed Roland Cundy, Iain Hamilton and Cllr Imogen Makepeace (Lewes) to the IDB's civility and respect workstream. Iain would replace Keith on the Canal and Rivers Trust.
- b) Affiliation fee review. The Board considered a draft questionnaire for county associations but agreed that this would be picked up as part of, or after, the strategic review.
- c) Sector Job evaluation scheme: Noted current position on the scheme which was awaiting feedback from LGA. Agreed that the question of clerks pay would better be considered outside the work of the Improvement and Development Board.

APPENDIX 5.1 | NATIONAL ASSEMBLY | 24 MARCH 2026

NALC strategic review

Purpose of report

For information.

Summary and recommendation

This report sets out progress on undertaking a review of NALC's strategic direction, which National Assembly is asked to note.

Background and summary

National Assembly previously agreed to prioritise a review of NALC's strategy and relationship with county associations to meet the evolving needs of members and the changing local government landscape, and respond to previous discussions about the Thriving Together initiative. The Management Board agreed external expertise was needed to provide capacity and add value by providing objectivity, constructive challenge and specialist insight and expertise.

The head of policy and communications was invited to develop proposals for external support for a strategic review, establishing a working group of Danny Moody, county officer, Northamptonshire County Association of Local Councils and Cllr Bradley, National Assembly member for Cumbria Association of Local Councils and member of the Management Board.

Three potential external contractors were identified followed by informal discussions to explore expectations, scope and budget. An outline proposal submitted by one gave an indication of possible costs. An allocation from reserves was agreed to support this work subject to detailed costings of external support to design and facilitate the review process.

Two proposals were submitted detailing their methodology, deliverables and costs. Each proposal demonstrated relevant experience and a clear understanding of the brief. The working group met both consultancies in January at the NALC office (one attended in person and the other took part remotely) to explore and discuss their proposals further and assess alignment, approach and cultural fit.

Having reviewed the submissions and subsequent discussions, the working group recommended to the Management Board that NALC should appoint Shared Intelligence to undertake the strategic review, which was agreed at their meeting on 23 February 2026. Their approach offers a strong balance of sector understanding, analytical rigour and collaborative working.

A summary of the proposed approach, using the UK Design Council's Double Diamond framework, ensuring a structured, transparent, and inclusive process is below:

Phase 1: Discover

- *Gather evidence on current challenges and opportunities*
- *Engage stakeholders across the sector (including parish and town councils, county associations and stakeholders)*
- *Assess external drivers (policy, funding, technology, governance)*

Phase 2: Define

- *Identify and agree the core problems to be solved*
- *Test emerging findings with stakeholders*
- *Produce a clear, shared understanding of sector needs and barriers*

Phase 3: Develop

- *Co-design potential solutions through stakeholder workshops*
- *Explore options such as: new service models, revised organisational structures, and updated advocacy priorities*
- *Assess solutions against impact, urgency, and strategic fit*

Phase 4: Deliver

- *Produce final outputs, including: a Strategic Framework (2026–2036) (“plan on a page”), an Implementation Roadmap, a supporting Strategic Review Report*

The next step is to agree with Shared Intelligence a detailed project plan including project management and oversight through a small steering group.

Recommendation: National Assembly is asked to note progress.

Contact officer: Justin Griggs, head of policy and communications
T: 07894 937885 e. Justin.Griggs@nalc.gov.uk