

To SALC Area Committees

Cc: SALC Executive

Report of the Area Committees Working Group

Over the last year, attendance at our Area Committees has fallen and some have not been meeting at all for various reasons. Under the terms of the SALC Constitution, the Executive can review the appropriateness and effectiveness of its Area Committee structure and make changes as may be required. To take this forward the Executive appointed from the meeting a Working Group (Cllrs Abbiss, Case, Evans and Parry).

The Group met on 12 May and firstly wished to place on record their thanks to the Area Committee Secretaries, Chairmen and others for their efforts over the last 18 months in trying to maintain the work of the Committees. They also appreciated the feedback, comments and suggestions from others. Taking all this into account, during their first meeting the Committee focussed on the following:

1. What is the Area Committees' purpose and value?
2. What do they achieve?
3. Whilst they have no decision making function, how do they influence and bring forward matters to the Executive?
4. Do Area Committees demonstrate that SALC is in touch with its Membership?
5. Should Area Committees be replaced with an alternative?
6. Other factors.

1. What is the Area Committees' purpose and value?

The Group recognised the value of AC's being exclusively for councillors and clerks from parish and town councils to assist in the sharing of good practice, ideas, and to identify and address local issues. Area Committees can help parish and town councils with their role and provide a forum where they can consider their relationship with principal authorities and others agencies through which they can ensure local provision of services and identify and solve common problems.

The purpose and remit of the AC's was considered by the Group to be as summarised below, extended to include their role as a consultative forum:

- *To provide a forum in which local councils are able to offer guidance and support for each other*
- *To share experiences and good practice between councils*
- *To exchange information and views*
- *To provide a channel of communication between local councils, SALC, principal councils and other groups*
- *To encourage local councils to work in partnership with each other and with principal partners*
- *To consider and offer a combined response to matters affecting a specific area*
- *To represent their area as a consultative forum with SALC and other agencies*
- *To formulate joint policies and explore area partnerships*
- *To receive information and briefings on topics of local concern*
- *To facilitate training and development*

- *To appoint parish representatives from their area to SALC's Executive and outside bodies*
- *To formulate recommendations and motions to SALC's Executive, to SALC's AGM and to NALC's Policy Committee via SALC Exec*
- *To take on a Scrutiny role on local services and highlight any issues with the appropriate agency and/or with SALC*
- *To set its own agenda and work autonomously*

2. What do Area Committees achieve?

The Group see the main achievements are in the provision of a dedicated forum to encourage clustering and networking, linking and harnessing local capacity, knowledge and skills with an improved flow of timely information in and around the Area; this leading to a better understanding of forthcoming changes that affect their local councils and communities.

3. How do Area Committees influence and bring forward matters to SALC's Executive?

The Group noted that matters are brought to the attention of the Executive via the Area Committee representatives. The Group also wish to see the Area Committees' role as a consultative forum, better developed and encouraged. The adoption of a Constitution, setting out the aims and objectives as or similar to those described above should help to remind the Committee how matters can be brought to the SALC Executive and ultimately to the National Association. The Group recommend the Area Committees adopt a Constitution if not already adopted and review their Constitution at each annual meeting.

4. Do Area Committees ensure SALC is in touch with its Membership?

Given falling attendance and reduced number of meetings over the last year, the Group considered its remit was now to ensure that SALC does stay in touch with its Membership through improved two way communication. The Group was mindful that attendance of SALC in person via its officers and Executive was important, as was raising awareness of the Area Committees' Terms of Reference as perceived by the Group (set out at 1 above) with AC Representatives on the Executive. Whilst AC representatives report back to the Executive, there was a need to ensure the representatives report back from the Executive to the Area Committee. Also, by promoting and encouraging Area Committees to adopt a Constitution which clearly sets out and reminds members of ways of working and how its voice can be heard, ACs should ensure SALC stays in touch with its Membership.

5. Should Area Committees be replaced with an alternative?

The Group considered the idea of consultative forums. However, in enhancing the role of AC's as consultees, they thought that forums had a specific role as an enabling county-wide arena for Members to receive information on specific topical matters for discussion and questions. The Group will be recommending three a year to the Executive, starting with a forum, for example, with the newly appointed MPs.

6. Other factors

In addition to encouraging AC's to adopt a Constitution or Terms of Reference that is reviewed at each annual meeting, the Group considered other factors as below:

- a) Order of business: Whilst the Group recognised and wished to maintain and encourage the autonomy of the ACs', a template of agenda items such as those below could be set out in its Constitution:-
 - 1) *Refreshments*
 - 2) *Election of Chairman/Chairman's welcome*

- 3) *Presentations/guest speakers/training/briefing session*
 - 4) *Apologies*
 - 5) *Minutes of last meeting*
 - 6) *Report of the Secretary on matters arising but not on the agenda*
 - 7) *Report of the AC Representative from the SALC Exec*
 - 8) *Report of SALC*
 - 9) *Secretary's report on Finances*
 - 10) *Issues of concern/exchange of information*
 - 11) *Matters for next meeting*
 - 12) *Date of next meeting – reminder*
- b) Meetings for the year agreed at the annual meeting so that meeting rooms can be booked and meeting dates publicised early and diarised.
 - c) A Programme for the year where possible, subject to additions/changes where new topics and issues arise
 - d) Attendees: Some ACs' invite non-member councils to their meetings to encourage membership. In a bid to raise attendance, SALC will publicise, and remind members of, meetings. This may raise awareness of meetings which Members from other areas may wish to attend and the Group would hope that ACs would welcome such attendees.
 - e) Fees: The Group recognised that some AC's for various reasons have not charged fees (Where fees are charged, these are collected by SALC through the Affiliation Fees invoice and passed on annually). The Group leave this to the discretion of the AC's.
 - f) LJCs: The Group recognised that LJCs may have been a contributing factor to low attendance but also recognised their very different role in relation to SALC/NALC.
 - g) FAQs: A set of these will be developed and included in a future Bulletin and on the SALC website.
 - h) Communications Flowchart: Appended below to aid understanding of communications between Area Committees and others.

Recommendation

The Group's comments and suggestions for Area Committees are set out in this report as a basis for consultation and welcome feedback to inform the next meeting of the Group. Please could feedback be provided by the end of July.

Communications Flowchart

