

# Staffordshire Parish Councils' Association



## Annual Report and Accounts 2019-2020

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# Chairman's Annual Report

It has without doubt been an extraordinary year, but I am equally certain that, when we look back in years to come, it will be one from which we can take a great deal of satisfaction in the work and the value of parish and town councils.

Long before anyone had heard of 'Covid-19', much attention was being given to the problems associated with 'social isolation', particularly in rural communities, and the Association was engaged actively with Staffordshire County Council to assist in the development of the County's "Doing our Bit" initiative to help address the issue. In a similar vein, the NALC Annual Conference in October 2019 witnessed the launch of "Reaching Out", a new joint NALC & Local Government Association guide to helping principal and local councils tackle loneliness. Cllr James Jamieson, Chairman of the Local Government Association, addressed the conference and stressed the need for all levels of local government to work closely together in pursuit of both the 'loneliness agenda' and other objectives. His words, and both the County Council's and NALC's initiatives, appeared to be remarkably prescient in terms of what was to come in March.

With the onset of the pandemic, many parish and town councils immediately took a strong and active lead in developing activities to help safeguard their respective communities, and there were many fine examples of the great work undertaken across the county in response in the early weeks of the emergency. Some of these were reported nationally in NALC's 'Coronavirus Case Studies' publication, in which Staffordshire councils were very well represented.

There have, of course, still been other matters to address and NALC continued to devote much attention to the future potential of and prospects for the local council sector. A regional NALC conference held in Birmingham a few weeks prior to the national event mentioned above focused on issues such as how to build capacity within councils, the provision of more training for councillors, the need to improve communications with electors, the recruitment of professional staff, and how to improve democratic legitimacy by ensuring that elections were contested. The practical difficulties in addressing such issues across a sector that embraced local councils ranging in size from 20 electors to more than 100,000 electors were, of course, noted, and the potential value of clustering of small individual parishes to help improve service provision was recognised.

We are fortunate that the Association has for many years been on a very sound financial footing with substantial reserves and for several consecutive years the affiliation fees payable to NALC have been absorbed without being passed on to individual member councils at a time when their own budgets have been under increasing pressure. A prudent call upon reserves has also enabled us to move forward with addressing one of the key issues mentioned in the foregoing paragraph, namely the provision of an enhanced programme of training for councillors, a matter which the Chief Executive addresses in his own comments. I would simply like to reflect upon how delighted I am to have been able to welcome Lisa Horritt to the SPCA team to work alongside Andrew and Richard and to witness the excellent work that she has already done in difficult circumstances. I am confident that Lisa will continue to serve us all well in years to come.

It is also pleasing to reflect upon how readily so many councils embraced the facility to meet 'on-line' courtesy of the emergency regulations which came into effect on 4<sup>th</sup> April. It does nonetheless have to be acknowledged that the enforced change hasn't suited all councils, and some, at least initially, struggled to adapt. Having said that, the assistance and encouragement of both NALC and SPCA has been invaluable in helping persuade some of the more reluctant or less able to participate, whatever the practical limitations that were being faced, particularly amongst those hampered by poor broadband service in remote locations. Quite what the long term future holds in store remains to be seen but I believe that we all have to anticipate that many of the changes we have had to make to how we conduct parish council business will prove to be permanent.

At an individual level, and now having got quite used to using 'Zoom', I suspect that many of us will have learnt rather more about computers and information technology during the course of the last year than we might ever have anticipated! Which is surely no bad thing!

*Patricia Ansell*

**Chairman and Vice President of SPCA**



# Chief Executive's Report

As the Chairman has commented (*opposite*), we were particularly fortunate to have put in place arrangements for the appointment of Lisa Horritt to the newly created post of Training Officer (part-time) with effect from 1<sup>st</sup> March 2020, just three weeks before the country entered national lockdown. Having been recruited to work towards the development of training activity principally in the traditional format, involving 'classroom-based' learning, Lisa immediately set about a revised brief in immediately switching all planning and activities towards 'on-line' delivery. A comprehensive programme covering a variety of subjects has already been fulfilled very successfully and the new approach has clearly been very well received by member councils, opening up as it has many opportunities for those councillors and clerks who might, under previous arrangements, have struggled to attend 'face-to-face' courses in order to participate. It is envisaged that whatever the coming months bring, in terms of access to physical premises for training purposes, the emphasis going forward will henceforth be very squarely on 'remote' learning, through the use not only of 'Zoom' meetings but also, in due course, self-study modules.

The day-to-day provision of general services, including all enquiry work, has continued uninterrupted throughout the pandemic and the associated implementation of restrictions. The SPCA office, sited in County Council premises in central Stafford, was to all intents and purposes closed at the end of March, consistent with lockdown recommendations that wherever possible staff should work from home. Notwithstanding subsequent relaxations over the summer months, the office has not been reopened and it is likely to remain closed for the foreseeable future, certainly well into 2021. The County Council's robust and effective Information and Communications Technology systems upon which SPCA has been reliant have proven their full worth and allowed our services to continue without interruption. Thus, in practical terms, the pandemic has had very little adverse impact on contact with the membership and in the Association's ability to respond promptly to enquiries; in recent years the focus has increasingly been on receiving and dealing with enquiries from clerks and chairs almost exclusively via email and the physical location of staff has, to a large extent, been of little significance.

Following the lead of member councils, the SPCA Executive continued to meet regularly throughout 2020, using 'Zoom' and thereby was able to oversee and direct the work of the Association. Again, it is envisaged that such arrangements will be maintained until such a time that 'physical' meetings can be held in absolute safety, albeit one might imagine that even when 'normality' returns the likelihood is that 'virtual' gatherings will remain at least in part a feature of the SPCA meeting programme, such has been the relative success of the new approach.

Another unanticipated benefit arising from the restrictions on meetings has been the development of much more regular contact amongst county associations and their officers from across the country. Whereas in 'normal' times a programme of quarterly meetings, invariably in London and taking up a full day of an individual officer's time, facilitated direct contact between CALCs, the enforced switch to the on-line format has led to the establishment of a programme of hour-long weekly meetings. These have allowed for full and frank exchanges of views and experiences on how best to advise member councils in dealing with the pandemic, in addition to responding to 'regular' business and the pursuit of initiatives to help the local council sector move forward. Such has been the success of this format in creating a forum for more immediate and inclusive contact between county associations that, similarly, it may well be the case that this will become by default the 'new normal' even when physical meetings are again both permissible and practicable.

*Andrew McRae*

## Receipts and payments Year to 31st March 2020

2018/19	Receipts	2019/20
1,451.31	Interest / Dividends	1,493.96
8,750.00	Grants received	8,750.00
395.74	Sales	766.53
53,673.00	Subscriptions	54,862.00
4,084.40	Training	5,144.00
252.96	Miscellaneous	
<b>68,607.41</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>71,016.99</b>
	<b>Payments</b>	
1,118.91	Meetings expenditure	1,520.48
457.05	Admin & Postage	82.50
289.97	Insurance	289.97
337.06	Printing costs	710.76
453.99	Purchases	642.27
34,981.85*	Salaries and overheads	38,190.03
	Pensions	2,563.92
26,626.27	Subs payments	27,938.82
916.05	Training costs	799.68
727.25	Travel expenses	621.74
100.00	Donation	0
<b>66,008.40</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>73,360.17</b>
2,599.01	Surplus / (Deficit)	(2,343.18)

## Balance Sheet as at 31st March 2020

Opening balance 1/4/20189	<b>£96,712.27</b>
Receipts	71,016.99
Payments	73,360.17
<b>Closing balance</b>	<b>94,369.09</b>

### Represented by:

CCLA Property Fund	30,000.00
CCLA Cash Fund	25,444.86
Cash at bank	48588.71
Less unpresented cheques	-2086.48
Plus unbanked receipts	0
Less early subs receipts	-7578.00
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>94,369.09</b>

### **Auditor's Certificate**

Audited and found correct according to the books and records supplied to me

*Alan Toplis*

## Executive Members whose term ends on 7th December

Cllr	Mike	Ackroyd	East Staffordshire		
Cllr	Mike	Allen	Stafford (Vice-President)		
Cllr	Pat	Ansell	Cannock Chase (Vice-President)		
Mr	Ian	Ashbolt	Newcastle-under-Lyme (President)		
Cllr	Sylvia	Burgess	Newcastle-under-Lyme		
Cllr	Victor	Kelly	South Staffordshire		
Cllr	Richard	Painter	South Staffordshire		
Cllr	Graham	Payne	Stafford		
Mr	Alan	Toplis	SPCA Auditor		
Cllr	Keith	Vernon	Lichfield		
				<b>Representation per district</b>	
				Cannock Chase	2
				East Staffordshire	5
				Lichfield	5
				South Staffordshire	5
				Stafford	7
				Staffordshire Moorlands	6
				Newcastle-under-Lyme	2

*Nominations for Officers are not district sensitive and therefore not accounted for in the representation per district*

## Executive Members whose term will end in 2021

Cllr	Henryk	Adamczuk	Newcastle-under-Lyme
Cllr	John	Bernard	Cannock Chase
Cllr	Nigel	Caine	South Staffordshire
Cllr	Isabella	Davies	Stafford
Cllr	Mark	Green	Stafford
Cllr	David	Hawley	Staffordshire Moorlands
Cllr	Tony	Holmes	Staffordshire Moorlands (Vice-President)
Cllr	Ron	Kinnersley	Staffordshire Moorlands
Cllr	Jayne	Marks	Lichfield
Cllr	Enrique	Mateau	Stafford
Cllr	Anthony	Minshall	South Staffordshire
Cllr	Hugh	Montgomery	East Staffordshire
Cllr	Wayne	Rogers	Staffordshire Moorlands

# **Staffordshire Parish Councils' Association**

**affiliated to the National Association of Local Councils**

Office address: Eastgate House, 79 Eastgate Street, Stafford, ST16 2NG  
Tel: (01785) 277499  
E mail: [spca.parish@staffordshire.gov.uk](mailto:spca.parish@staffordshire.gov.uk)  
Website: [www.spcaonline.org.uk](http://www.spcaonline.org.uk)

Chief Executive: Andrew McRae  
Training Officer: Lisa Horritt  
Administration Officer: Richard Ellison

## **Objects of the Association**

The aims and objects of the Association are to take all such steps as may be necessary or desirable in the interest of the members consistent with the objects of the National Association of Local Councils, which are:-

- (i) to protect and promote the interests, rights, functions and privileges of members
- (ii) to offer advice to members in the performance of their duties
- (iii) to promote and develop the social, economic and environmental life of parishes and villages;
- (iv) to promote training to support an increasingly professional local government sector

## **Benefits to Member Councils**

- Legal/financial/general/on advice council administration and activities
- Publication of information packs, circulars, legal topic notes, briefing notes, "The Good Councillor's Guide", model documents
- Regular newsletter

## **Information and Training includes**

- Technical Library, databases
- Tailored seminars for clerks and councillors including special topics e.g. chairmanship skills, end of year accounts, VAT, planning, CiLCA; courses are currently delivered 'on-line'

## **Lobbying and Wider Representation**

- Executive Committee selected from amongst Parish Councils and partner organisations
- SPCA representatives sit on Police Committees, Locality Action Partnerships, Parish Forums etc.
- A representative on the NALC Executive to advise NALC which, in turn, lobbies central Government on behalf of the local council sector
- In-depth professional legal/policy advice on the many changes taking place in local government is a sector specific service provided by the National Association of Local Councils for member Councils

## **Promoting Good Local Governance by:**

- Raising the profile of parishes
- Campaigning for new parishes
- Informing the public about parish councils
- Disseminating good practice
- Encouraging greater democratic awareness



**nalc**  
National Association  
of Local Councils

 **Staffordshire**  
County Council

*the knot unites*

