



Minutes of the Executive Committee

5th January 2024

Venue: Virtual (Public) Meeting

SDCT Website: www.cipfa.org/partners/society-of-district-council-treasurers

LinkedIn: [Society of District Council Treasurers \(SDCT\)](https://www.linkedin.com/company/society-of-district-council-treasurers)

SDCT Members in Attendance: Adrian Rowbotham (President), Alison Scott, Richard Gibson, Christine Marshall, Simon Freeman, David Stanley, Jon Illingworth, Emma Foy, Terry Collier, Richard Baker, Clare Fletcher, Bev Bull, Clive Mason

- ❖ It was confirmed that the meeting was quorate (i.e. one third of Executive members were present)

Also in attendance: Nico Heslop (DLUHC) for item 2, Andrew Chappell (PSAA), Guy Clifton (GT), Heather Wills (LGA), Rob Baxter (Link), Bevis Ingram (LGA), Sarah Ironmonger (GT)

Welcome and Goodbye:

The Chair welcomed everyone and wished them a Happy New Year
Bev Bull – Bev will be leaving Oadby & Wigston Council and joining the fire service. The Executive thanked Bev for her contribution to the SDCT and wished her all the best in her new role.

1. **SDCT Executive Apologies:** Angela George (Secretary),
Also: Rikin Tailor (FRC), Vicky Davis, (NAO) Nicola Morton (LGA), Joanne Pitt (CIPFA),

Minutes of previous meetings:

The minutes of the previous meeting of the 8th December 2023 were agreed and will be published on the website.

Outstanding Actions:

- **(2) HRA: Homira – on agenda later**
- **(2) Drainage Board Levy:**
Christine updated members on progress with this issue and will continue to feedback as appropriate. There is a big event in February and Christine has met with DEFRA, Sparse and DLUHC. IDBs are potentially taking on debt to fund their obligations.

Action – Christine

Items (5,6 & 11 on agenda later)
Item 9 Timetable has been agreed.

Any other matters arising, or other outstanding issues are considered further on the agenda.

2. Financial Issues Update:

(A) Nico Heslop (DLUHC) attended the meeting and updated the Executive on recent issues including the draft settlement. The following key points were raised:

- The consultation closes on the 15th January 2024.
- It was confirmed SDCT were putting together a response.
- It was stated that the next spending review will be a long-term solution to NHB
- No major reforms are expected in advance of the election.
- A discussion ensued and HJ stated that there are significant local pressures that need long term solutions to particularly around homelessness.

(B) ALATS Resilience Survey – AR reported that he had not seen output yet but was aware there had been limited responses.

(C) Section 114 – Determined to keep this item on the agenda, but no further recent reports of other authorities.

3. Local Government Audit update

- FRC

Rikin Taylor was unable to attend the meeting.

- PSAA

Andrew Chappell:

PSAA are still awaiting the backlog solution decision to provide the detail to follow on from the Ministerial Statement in July.

There is a hope there will be a consultation in February and officials are working through the detail to prepare for the consultation. The Comptroller and Auditor General will consult on three areas:

1. Enable revised statutory deadlines.
2. Enable a narrower focus for outstanding years VFM then go back after and move to a more timely reporting of the code.
3. Extend handover period between auditors.

There will be something in the consultation around how the end of September deadline impacts subsequent years.

CF stated that because nothing was moving currently on old years audits 2022/23 cannot be complete by the backstop date. She asked whether there would be enough time between the consultation period, feedback and backstop for meaningful change.

AC stated they are aware of this challenge and whilst PSAA are telling auditors there is work to do they are unable to direct the work of auditors and acknowledged that there was a lot of work to do to meet the 30 September 2023.

There is active conversations between CIPFA LASAAC to avoid history repeated.

4. CIPFA / LASAAC – Feedback on the Accounts and Materiality Project

Alison Scott - we are still awaiting announcement from Ministers.

5. Upcoming Consultations

John Illingworth:

- **MRP consultation and Capital Flexibilities consultation**– this has been issued, Christine and John are working on a response to this. It will be shared with Executive.
- **Action – Christine / John**

- **Provisional Finance Settlement**
Adrian Rowbotham has sent out draft for comments and will be sent to wider membership today.
- **Action – Adrian**

EXTERNAL ADVISOR UPDATES

6. LGA – Improvement and Assurance Framework for Local Government

Heather Wills (slide pack on website)

HW introduced the new framework, there had been some queries on their finance improvement offer. Some work on this has been commissioned from EY on financial uncertainty and there will be some LGA round tables in February to test the thinking on this.

Members were asked to contact Heather if they would like to know more.

There was a discussion about the Finance monitoring and the desire to find a correlation between experience and needs. The LGA's Finance Associates are also available to support this.

There is also a request for more Finance Peers as part of the Peer Challenge Offer.

Some members discussed that whilst they would like to do peer challenges the timings of them don't work.

HW stated that there is the ability to comment on the new framework and offer by searching for assurance framework on the LGA website. There is an online survey link that can be completed. HW asked whether this could be shared further with colleagues.

CM discussed the ongoing requirement and reinvention of improvement products and offers over time.

7. LGA – Bevis Ingram

Bevis confirmed that the majority of information to share had already been covered in other agenda items.

LGA have put together settlement response and it will be covered at the Finance conference on Tuesday. They will also be attending consultation meetings.

The date of the Spring budget has been announced with submissions due with Treasury on 24th January 2024.

Joanna Killian has been appointed the new CEO of the LGA

8. Grant Thornton – (Guy Clifton and Sarah Ironmonger)

The previous SDCT meeting was just after GT had published their latest report pm preventing failure in Local Government.

GT are still working towards end of March to close previous year audits up to 2022-23. Some districts have not produced 2022-23 accounts yet. GT have started working on their new clients from the more recent allocation of work but this is challenging when there is work from previous years is outstanding.

The Preventing failure report looks at the sector as a whole with the background to the work being an increased in the understanding of governance and assurance failures in contributing to failure.

9. Link – Rob Baxter - Rob gave an update on current issues for Link.

10. CIPFA – Joanne Pitt – Joanne gave an update on current issues for CIPFA

11. NJC – Harry Honor – Issues to be brought to a later meeting.

12. SDCT – Executive Advisor Updates

We agreed at a previous meeting to try this approach whereby we would have updates if there is something specific to be discussed. No items at this meeting.

13. Any other Business

None and thank you to our guests.

14. Date of next meeting

SDCT Conference at Warwick University – 07/03/24-08/03/2024

15. Private Executive Business:

The settlement response was discussed, and it was stated and agreed that there were now very few levers available to balance the books. Authorities are nervous to take lots of long-term decisions and whilst Civil Servants have a good knowledge of County funding, they do not understand that districts have limited ability to balance the books. Debate ensued and members shared their experiences at their authorities and situations where they had to discuss funding issues with the Funding Team.

The Executive discussed further issues to be included in the SDCT response. Adrian will coordinate and submit the final response.

Action – Adrian

Future SDCT Housing Roundtable

This is being progressed with DCN - no firm date has been agreed yet.

Action – Terry / Emma to progress.

SDCT Conference 7th and 8th March 2024.

The draft agenda was discussed, some members felt they would like an alternative speaker for the last session on the second day so that it was different from the last few years.

Members were asked to confirm their availability and attendance as rooms were being allocated.