



Minutes of the Executive Committee

21st April 2023

Venue: Virtual (Private) Meeting

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

SDCT Members in Attendance: Adrian Rowbotham (President), Jon Illingworth (Vice President), Angela George (Secretary), Clare Fletcher (Treasurer), Alison Scott, Homira Javadi, David Stanley, Terry Collier, Carolin Martlew, Richard Baker, Simon Freeman, Peter Catchpole, Emma Foy, Christine Marshall, Richard Gibson.

1. Adrian opened the meeting by welcoming everyone to his first meeting as President and thanking Alison for her time as President and for leading the society through some very challenging times.

Presentation – Neil Harris, Director of Local Audit, FRC

Adrian welcomed Neil Harris, Director of Local Audit for the Financial Reporting Council. Neil had provided the Executive with the following documents:

- Recently signed and published Memorandum of Understanding with DLUHC setting out the five areas of responsibility that the FRC will have as incoming shadow system leader for local audit.
- His presentation to the LGA finance conference in January 2023.

The Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) sets out what has been agreed between DLUHC and the FRC on the roles and responsibilities the FRC will take on as system leader during the shadow period, which will precede the intended establishment of ARGA through legislation, when full system leadership is intended to commence.

The process of local audit is complex and the arena in which it is conducted is dynamic. To respond to challenges and opportunities, the local audit system needs a leading voice and a coordinating hand. To fulfil this role the FRC will have five areas of responsibility as system leader:

1. Lead a coherent and coordinated response to challenges arising across the system.
2. Facilitate stronger governance across the local audit framework.
3. Lead work to improve competition, bolster capability and market supply.
4. Oversee the entire quality framework for local audit.
5. Report on the local audit system.

The documents provided a useful overview to the Executive and Neil verbally updated on where the FRC is with the transition into the new role and the work they are doing jointly with DLUHC on the timeliness measures. Neil was keen to hear the Executive views on where the FRCs priorities should be, the communications and engagement we would find useful going forward, any burning concerns we have on the FRC's role and setting out perspectives on the measures we would prioritise to significantly improve timeliness.

Neils presentation was followed by a wide-ranging discussion on the serious problems currently being encountered and priorities for potential solutions. The discussion concluded with the acknowledgment that the current position is not working for anybody, and solutions as opposed to further discussions were required urgently. Neil stated that although he is not delaying the need for urgent solutions to the backlog, he would welcome perspectives from across the local audit systems on why delays are happening overall in order that any short, medium and long terms measures have the best impact. Neil requested that any further feedback be sent to him directly. Clare undertook to carry out a poll of the Executive members as a start with potential to involve all Districts if that would be beneficial.

Action – Clare to undertake poll of Executive on where and why delays are taking place per individual authority.

It was confirmed that the Annual Accounts deadline for 22/23 was 31/5/23 and recognising the difficulties this posed.

2. **SDCT Executive Apologies:** Clive Mason

3. **Minutes of previous meetings:**

The minutes of the previous meeting of 6th January 2023 were agreed. Matters arising, or outstanding issues are considered further on the agenda.

Feedback from the SDCT AGM held at Warwick on 16th and 17th March had been positive and it was agreed that the dates should be reserved again for 2024. It was suggested that a brief meeting of the Executive prior to the start of the conference would be useful, and this was agreed. It was noted that there were a couple of slide packs from the Conference still missing from the SDCT website and this will be pursued.

Action – Angela to reserve dates for the AGM in 2024 and chase missing slide packs from the 2023 AGM.

4. **Financial Issues – Reserves Survey results**

There are two strands to the Reserves work: DLUHC and ALATS.

DLUHC Reserves Working Group – Jon attended the fourth group meeting yesterday. There has also been a specific RO form practitioners meeting.

ALATS Reserves Survey

Adrian reported that there had been a 47% response rate and thanked everyone for their input. A technical team is now looking at the data and will do a reconciliation to the RO forms for a sample number of LA's to check credibility of the data.

There will be an ALATS meeting in May to feedback on the data.

5. **SDCT Constitution Update**

A revised draft Constitution had been circulated for comment. A few comments have been received and Angela will finalise the agreed wording with the appropriate members and circulate the amended Constitution for agreement with the Executive.

Clare Fletcher (SDCT Treasurer) has requested clarification on a number of issues including formally recording the head office address details for SDCT which are:

Clare Fletcher,
Strategic Director (CFO) Stevenage Borough Council,
Daneshill House,
Danestrete,
Stevenage,
Herts SG1 1HN

Adrian highlighted the roles and expectations of Executive members. He stated that it was a privileged position to hear information first hand that other S151's do not have, therefore it was only fair that all fully contribute to the workings of the Executive

Action – Angela to finalise the Constitution and recirculate for approval.

6. SDCT Advisor Areas

Angela advised that there had been to expressions of interest for the 2nd Vice President position and as such the Executive members would be asked to cast their vote in accordance with the Constitution.

Action – Angela to progress.

A number of changes to the advisor areas were suggested including:

- A new role of Consultation Co-ordinator – this would be a Vice President responsibility.
- Splitting Climate Change and Waste into 2 separate areas.

Adrian requested that each member of the Executive identified their 1st, 2nd, and 3rd choices of areas they would be interested in supporting. Each Executive member should ideally be leading on one area.

Action - Executive members to feedback their preferences to Angela who will update the Advisor areas.

Angela requested that once this was done that each lead advisor report back to a future Executive meeting setting out which groups were being supported within their specific area and identifying any gaps in support.

Action – Lead Advisors

7. CIPFA Conference SDCT Workshop -

The theme for the SDCT workshop to be held at the CIPFA Conference on 28th June at 13.25 will be - Are we facing a temporary accommodation crisis and what can be done?

Proposed themes and speakers were discussed, and it was agreed that Terry and Emma would feed back their specific ideas.

Action – Terry and Emma

There is a special rate for Executive members at CIPFA conference and Angela will re-circulate details. It was also noted that any speakers at the workshop would get free entry to the whole conference.

Action - Angela

8. Any Other Business

- Adrian and Alison attended the LGF Treasurers Catch Up on 17/04/23:
 - Extended Producer Responsibility – views on DEFRA/DLUHC session. LA's need to be briefed as they did not understand it last week. Did not highlight the best

of LG. For the future – more focused conversation, group could consist of a couple of reps from each treasurer’s society. Need more clarity.

- European Social Fund Update. DWP have £150m to retrospectively support the reception and relief of refugees fleeing the war in Ukraine. Open to Upper tier LA’s (deadline 15/05/23), allocated amounts. No complicated application process or proof of spend so easy to administer. May want to ensure your county is applying and see how some of the funding can be passed down to districts.
- Consultation Updates – none outstanding that anyone was aware of.
- Adrian reported that he had met with the DCN who were keen to work closely with SDCT. He has also attended the LGA / CFO Sounding Board.
- Website – The history of the current website was briefly explained. There are limitations to its use but without a great deal of extra effort and cost the issues would not be resolved easily. It was suggested that a newsletter following each Executive meeting should be re-introduced and this was agreed.

Action - Adrian

9. DONM – 19th May 2023 10am (Public)