



The purpose of this paper is to ask Members to consider the Discussion Paper on the Future of the Isle of Wight Association of Local Councils (IWALC) circulated by the Clerk to the organisation's membership and the Island's Clerks and to agree any further action.

No. DETAILS

1) BACKGROUND

- a) The 9 October Meeting of the Town Council considered the Clerk's Report 81/17 that set out the circumstances in which the Workshop IWALC had arranged for 31 October had been cancelled.
- b) As recorded in Minute 119/17 of that meeting, the proposal that the Discussion Paper the Clerk would have presented to the planned Workshop should be circulated to IWALC's Members and the Island's Clerk was agreed.
- c) The document was accordingly circulated as agreed on 23 October and a copy is attached to this Report.
- d) It has prompted two supportive email responses from Clerks but had no response from IWALC members.

2) NEXT ACTION

- a) The Mayor, in his capacity as the Town Council's representative to IWALC, has asked for the Discussion Paper to be on the Agenda of IWALC's next meeting that will take place on 16 November.
 - b) A discussion of these developments at this meeting would provide the Mayor with guidance on the Town Council's position in respect of IWALC's current structure and its own membership of it.
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VENTNOR TOWN COUNCIL

DISCUSSION PAPER

IWALC

OCTOBER 2017

This Discussion Paper is for circulation to all the Island's Town & Parish Councils through their IWALC representatives and Clerks.

It explores the questions of whether IWALC is currently fit for purpose and what alternatives might be available?

Although Ventnor Town Council has given permission for the circulation of such a Paper, the views expressed in it are those of its Clerk and not necessarily of the Council.

1) BACKGROUND

- a) At its Meeting of 8 August 2016 concerns about IWALC were considered and the Town Council resolved to invite IWALC's Chair and Vice-Chair for an informal discussion with Members.
- b) That resulted in an invitation to make a presentation to the IWALC Business Meeting of 15 September: that presentation is attached to this Discussion Paper: the meeting decided to take no further action on the matters raised in it
- c) At IWALC's Annual General Meeting of 20 July 2017 however: *It was agreed that the October workshop should be to discuss how IWALC works and where we were going.*
- d) That workshop was arranged by an email from the Secretary for 31 October at the Riverside *for a small group of up to 10 councillors and clerks to discuss ways we can do things better for you. I would be grateful if you could let me know if you would like to form part of the workshop and, if so, if you could give some thought as to how we can do things better.*
- e) However, a further email from the Secretary on 4 October announced that: *Due to the lack of response to our invitation for members to form a small workshop on the 31 October to discuss how IWALC could improve going forward, it has been decided to cancel it. If the topic is brought up by members in the future then we will review the situation.*
- f) It is that cancellation that has prompted the circulation of this Discussion Paper.

2) FIT FOR PURPOSE?

- a) IWALC's purposes are admirable, as set out in section 2 of its Constitution:
 - (a) *To represent the interests of the first tier of statutory local government, comprising of Town and Parish Councils in the Isle of Wight, hereinafter called collectively 'Local Councils'.*
 - (b) *To provide support and co-ordination to all aspects of the work of Local Councils, as embodied in the following principles of good local government.*
 - *To promote the health, safety and wellbeing, both material and cultural of the people in its various communities.*
 - *To attract and hold the interests of its citizens.*
 - *To develop inherent strength to deal with, and work with all other tiers of local, regional and national government.*
 - *To adapt itself to change in response to the needs of citizens in the local community.*
 - *To protect, consolidate and develop the existing rights, privileges and functions of Local Councils.*
- b) There is, however, little evidence that IWALC, as currently structured, is able to deliver on these objectives for the reasons set out in the following paragraphs.
- c) *Membership:* its current Membership includes only 75% of the Island's Town & Parish Councils (25 of 33) with Bembridge Parish Council, Calbourne Parish Council, East Cowes Town Council Nettlestone & Seaview Parish Council, Shanklin Town Council, Totland Parish Council and Whippingham Parish Council choosing not to participate. In 2013 only Shanklin Town Council was not in membership; in the four years since, Membership has declined by 22%.

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- d) *Meetings*: its Members only meet every other month – six times a year – to conduct business and one of those is its Annual General Meeting. There is also a tendency for its meetings to be dominated by County Councillors.
 - e) *Attendance*: Each of its past two meetings – the Annual General Meeting of 20 July and its latest Executive Meeting of 21 September - was only attended by two-thirds of its existing Membership (16/25).
 - f) *Resources*: its total income in 2017/17 was £12,949 against expenditure of £15,644; over the course of the last two years its balance has declined by 25%, from £19,547 at 31 March 2015 to £14,643 at 31 March 2017.
 - g) *Staff*: its only staff member, the Secretary, is employed for just 9 hours a week at £11/hour.
 - h) *Structure*: Most third sector not-for-profit membership organisations (IWALC's description of its structure on its web site) have an Executive Committee of relatively small size, elected by its members to consist of a group of people selected for their expertise/experience across the range of areas for which the organisation is responsible and able to meet regularly.

IWALC, however, defines as its Executive what in other organisations would be regarded as a General Meeting (one all Members are entitled to attend). It has no sub-committees or Working Groups. It has the power to appoint sub-committees, but at this year's AGM decided to disband the only one – Finance and General Purposes – it had established.

Consequently it has no mechanism for policy development or strategic or operational planning.
 - i) *Diversity*: the broad range of differences between the Island's 33 Town & Parish Councils in size, geography, precept, service delivery and political persuasion also makes the development of policy and agreed positions difficult.

3) IN SUMMARY

- a) IWALC is an organisation that has lost 22% of its membership in four years, now only represents 75% of the Island's Town & Parish Councils, has lost 25% of its reserves over the last two years, has had no engagement with the major My Life a Full Life and Sustainability & Transformation Plans that are impacting on its top objective and only meets five times a year for matters affecting the delivery of its objectives.
- b) In the absence of any agreed and publicised corporate strategy and related policies it is reduced to a supplicant role in monthly meetings with the Isle of Wight Council.
- c) Additionally, with the cancellation of the Workshop to discuss its future development, it clearly sees no reason to change or develop.

4) OPTIONS

- a) There are at least five options for the future of collaborative action by the Island's Town and Parish Councils, not all of which are necessarily incompatible:
 - IWALC continues as it is
 - A reformed and restructured IWALC
 - Town & Parish Councils collaborate on the basis of shared need or opportunity
 - Individual Town & Parish Council membership of the Hampshire Association of Local Councils (HALC).
 - Application to HALC to become a subsidiary group within HALC
 - b) *IWALC to continue as is*: given the structural weaknesses identified in section (2) above this option is not only undesirable it is probably unsustainable as more of its current Member Councils are likely to revisit the 'value for money' issue as resource pressures continue to increase for local delivery.
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- c) *A reformed/restructured IWALC*: although there is currently no appetite for change among the majority of its Executive that could change as its structural weaknesses and continuing bleed of membership and resources are acknowledged. It is the contention of this Paper that the areas for change would need to include at least:
- The recognition that the current Executive is actually a General Meeting and the establishment of an effective Executive accountable to that Meeting but meeting as often as developments require.
 - A commitment to the establishment of Working Groups on defined policy/opportunity areas including participants recruited from beyond the General Meeting to ensure the involvement of relevant experience and expertise.
 - A mechanism for the involvement of representatives of the Island's Clerks and for collaboration with the Local Society of Local Council Clerks (SLCC).
 - A continuing recognition of the positive contribution from County Councillors based on their experience, awareness of County Council business and representative role, but as non-voting observers
- d) *Collaborative working within ad hoc groups of Town & Parish Councils*: Ventnor Town Council has already been involved in two such developments and is planning for a third, as outlined briefly here:
- Following the devolution of Public Toilets to Town & Parish Councils in 2016, thirteen of us agreed to negotiate a single contract with Wallgate Ltd – the company that services the hand-washing machines – to cover our 136 machines with a resultant saving of £4,000 (25%) on the original quotations to individual Councils.
 - In response to the My Life a Full Life Programme's commitment to Locality Working with the resultant division of the Island into the three Localities of North & East Wight, South Wight and West & Central a structure has developed, funded by the Programme, to facilitate Town & Parish Council engagement. It takes the form of each Locality having a Health & Wellbeing Parishes Forum that meet regularly with senior staff from the Programme with arrangements being made by the designated Lead Council in each area.
 - There are three Town & Parish Councils on the Island – Newport, Ryde and Ventnor – that contain the five areas of the Island designated as being in the most deprived 20% nationally: we hope to do some joint work in encouraging the Island's major agencies to give these areas appropriate priority.
- e) *Individual membership of the Hampshire Association of Local Councils (HALC)*: this option has already been taken up by Bembridge Parish Council.
- f) *Corporate membership of the Hampshire Association of Local Councils (HALC)*: this option might also be available following appropriate discussions as HALC's internal organisation is based on seven District Councils based on Local Authority Areas with each appointing a Director to its main Board. With an annual budget of around £207k, eight part-time staff and well established decision making structures it clearly doesn't have the restrictions that IWALC has to try to deal with, as can be seen from its web site [here](#).

5) CONCLUSION

- a) There are several reasons why it is essential for Town & Parish Council's to be able to co-ordinate effective joint action.
 - b) Over the last four years we have taken on an additional annual spend of £1.8 million – doubling the previous total Island Precept – to fund the services cut from the Isle of Wight
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Councils Budget. This has added significantly to the taxation levied on the residents we represent and, as ever, taxation must be underpinned by representation.

- c) Although the additional services we now provide have come with at least a measure of local control, that control is limited to the services the Isle of Wight Council has determined by its decision to withdraw funding from them.
 - d) It took two years determined lobbying to secure a role for Town & Parish Councils in the major programme affecting the future of the health services available to our residents – My Life a Full Life – and we are to date excluded from discussions on the even more significant Sustainability and Transformation Plan for Hampshire & the Isle of Wight.
 - e) The recently adopted new Corporate Plan of the Isle of Wight Council makes only one concession to Town & Parish Councils in the form of an Annual Seminar.
 - f) It is a fact – as the Localism Agenda of the last 10 years has recognised – that local communities should have a recognised role in and strengthened influence on all the major decisions affecting the quality of life of their residents: it's our role to make that effective.
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