



Minutes of the Executive Committee

26th July 2024

Venue: Virtual (Public) Meeting

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

LinkedIn: Society of District Council Treasurers (SDCT)

SDCT Members in Attendance: Adrian Rowbotham (President), Angela George (Secretary), Alison Scott, Clare Fletcher, Jon Illingworth, Terry Collier, Richard Baker, Homira Javadi, Peter Catchpole, Paul Stone, Bec Maher, Simon Hewings, Lorraine Rogers, Colleen Warren.

- ❖ 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 5, Andrew Chappell (PSAA), Guy Clifton and Paul Dossett (GT), Mike Newbury and Philip Taylor (NAO), Alex Burfitt (LGA), Joanne Pitt (CIPFA), Zaina Steityah (FRC).

1. **SDCT Executive Apologies:** Christine Marshall, David Stanley, Simon Freeman, Hannah Doney, Suzanne Jones, Peter Catchpole.

Also: Vicky Davis (NAO), Nicola Morton (LGA), Robert Baxter (Link)

2. **Welcome to new SDCT Executive Members:**

The Executive welcomed Paul Stone (NW Leics), Bec Maher (S Staffs), Simon Hewings (South Ox and Vale), Lorraine Rogers (East Suffolk), and Colleen Warren (Oadsby and Wigston) to their first meetings of the Executive.

3. **Minutes of previous meetings:**

The minutes of the previous meeting of 17th May 2024 were agreed and will be published on the website.

Outstanding Actions:

- Peter will progress the suggested group of LA's who have limited companies.

Action - Peter

Any other matters arising have either been actioned or are considered further on the agenda.

4. **Feedback from SDCT Workshop – CIPFA Conference 10th July**

Adrian reported that the session on Streamlining the Accounts was very well attended and with good audience engagement, with a focus on Assets, Pensions and Materiality levels. The panel members in addition to Adrian were Paul Dossett (GT),

Jonathan Flowers (Independent Chair of the Audit and Governance Committee at St Albans) and Sir Tony Redmond (Lead Commissioner at Woking Borough Council).

Adrian has met with Alison Scott and Mark Green (CIPFA/ LASAAC members) and the next steps are to set up 2 working groups to sense check the areas of focus and propose changes which would then report back to the next SDCT Executive meeting on 6th September. Alison Scott will send the invitations, and it was requested that all Executive members endeavour to attend one of the sessions. The results would then be passed on to the CIPFA Better Reporting Group. A few case studies would also be developed on the cost / time of producing accounts (in terms of vfm and diverting focus away from more productive and useful work).

Action – Alison to issue invitations to the working groups and all Exec Members to endeavour to attend one of the meetings.

5. Financial Issues Update:

Nico Heslop, from the newly renamed Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government MHCLG (formerly DLUHC) reported that it was early days working with the new Government since the election on 4th July, and initial meetings were taking place with new ministers. The next few weeks would hopefully provide some clarity on the new Government plans and in particular the devolution proposals and spending review timeframes - acknowledging on the latter that the timescales were difficult.

In response to a query, he had no data on the recently submitted Productivity Plans.

6. Local Government Audit update

- FRC

Zaina Steityeh the newly appointed Deputy Director of Local Audit at the FRC was in attendance and gave an update from the FRC perspective on their recent work and priorities. There was currently (at the time of the meeting) no further word on the backstop proposals.

- NAO

Mike Newbury and Philip Taylor updated the Executive on several issues .
The NAO latest work can be found from our home page: [Home - National Audit Office \(NAO\)](#). Work in progress can be found here: [National Audit Office publications \(nao.org.uk\)](#)

Other issues were:

- Homelessness published yesterday as part of the bundle of NAO reports – good press coverage and we reference experience of district councils (DCN and also Eastbourne gets a direct reference). No idea if it will reach PAC or not.
- Building safety – now publishing in November

- Local government financial sustainability - publishing early 2025. In relation to this study the Executive are asked whether they would be happy to talk to Philip at NAO to give some firsthand insight. Our key audit questions are:
 - The context of local government finances in 2024
 - What impact is local government finance having on service delivery?
 - Does the government's approach to the local government finance system meet current and future needs?

And couple of points NAO are particularly interested in is the choices and trade-offs councils need to make to balance their budgets, the balance of services between districts and counties, for example as counties focus more and more on for example Adults, Children, SEND what impact does that have on districts.

Action – SDCT Executive members interested in taking part in this study please contact Philip directly

- In general terms, NAO are reviewing the announcements made in the King’s Speech and what may be announced next week in the HMT ministerial statement to consider any potential impact on current and future work programme.
- There are a couple of other reports which came out this week such as local roads; carbon capture, use and storage; and NHS financial sustainability which might be of wider interest.

- **PSAA**

Andrew Chappell gave an update on the number of audits currently outstanding. He also advised that the new Secretary of State for MHCLG had advised that Local Government Finance reform would start with Audit.

7. Consultations:

There are no upcoming consultations. However, it is anticipated that there will be a number to come once the new Government gets established.

Jon reported that he would circulate a proposal to assist more proactive updates to consultations via SharePoint, and this would also work for the updates from SDCT Executive advisors

Action - Jon

8. External Advisor updates:

- **CIPFA:**

Jo Pitt reported on current CIPFA initiatives including proposals to improve workforce and capacity issues and skill for CFO’s. In relation to this CIPFA wish to establish a working and steering group and asked that if anyone from the Executive were interested, to contact Jo directly. Zaina reported that FRC are also looking at these issues and would be interested in a conversation.

Action – Executive members to contact Jo if interested in supporting the new Group.

CIPFA are also updating the CIPFA / SOLACE guidance for the Annual Governance Statement (AGS) and a number of groups are being set up. Again, if any member of the Executive is interested in taking part in the group, please contact Jo directly
Action – Executive members to contact Jo if interested in supporting AGS group.

- **LGA:**

Alex Burfitt updated the Executive on the current work of the LGA – much is currently waiting for new Government decisions and that Ministers have reform in mind. He advised that submissions to the spending review would be required in early September. He also reported that the LGA Conference would be held from 22nd to 24th October in Harrogate.

- **Grant Thornton**

Guy Clifton and Paul Dossett updated the meeting on the current GT Their latest sector report was published recently: <https://www.grantthornton.co.uk/insights/value-for-money-audits-lessons-for-local-authorities/>

GT were continuing to focus on completing many 2022/23 audits as they are able before the backstop and will then be on helping the sector return to balance. Paul highlighted the difficulty in attracting candidates to the audit profession which is currently seen as unattractive in its current state.

- **Link Group**

Apologies were received from Rob Baxter.

9. SDCT Executive - Advisor updates

There were no updates from the Executive.

Jon will progress the SharePoint template to enable an easier process for updates in future.

Action – Jon

10. Any Other Business

- None

11. DONM – 6th September 10am (PRIVATE for Executive members – virtual)

12. Private Executive Business:

- **Updates from other meetings:**

- Jon gave updates on the recent ALATS and Trusted Treasurer meeting
- Alison updated on an Extended Producer Pays group she had attended (and is now a member of) – there needs to be much more clarity on the way forward.

- **IFS**

Adrian updated the meeting on a request received from the IFS regarding the possibility of Districts contributing funding to future IFS research. Following discussion Adrian will discuss this further with the IFS.

Action – Adrian

- **Staff Sharing / Secondments**

Jon discussed a proposal for staff sharing / secondments in Districts and asked for views if it was worth progressing the idea. Following discussion, it was agreed it would be progressed further.

Action – Jon

- **SDCT Vacancies and Advisor areas**

Angela advised that there is currently one vacancy to the Executive Committee and two potential applicants. A waiting list system will be introduced in the event of more CFO's being interested than places available, albeit the Executive have the power to co-opt members onto the society as it considers appropriate.

The advisor areas will be updated once the outstanding potential applicants have been received and processed and the new members of the Executive will at that stage be allocated to roles. If any current advisors require additional support, please advise Angela ASAP.

Action - Angela

- **SDCT Fees 2024/25**

Clare reported that the subscriptions for 2024/25 have now been issued in accordance with the decision of the Executive on 7th March 2024 to approve the accounts and once again freeze the fees. This was ratified at the SDCT Conference and AGM in Warwick on 8th March.