



**ALL-PARTY PARLIAMENTARY
GROUP ON LOCAL GOVERNMENT**

Annual General Meeting of the APPG on Local Government

Minutes

Wednesday, 13th March 2024, 14:00-15:00 | Room W3, Westminster Hall

Attendees

Parliamentarians

1. Chris Clarkson MP (Conservative)
2. Paul Holmes MP (Conservative)
3. Angela Richardson MP (Conservative)
4. Sara Britcliffe MP (Conservative)
5. Rob Butler MP (Conservative)
6. Chris Green MP (Conservative)
7. Julie Marson MP (Conservative)
8. Greg Smith MP (Conservative)

External stakeholders

- Dr Jonathan Carr-West, Local Government Information Unit (Group secretariat)
- Dr Mark Sandford - Senior Researcher, House of Commons Library
- Jen Pufky, Local Government Information Unit (Group secretariat)
- Simone Short, Local Government Information Unit (Group secretariat, minutes)

Members who were not present

9. Sarah Atherton MP (Conservative)
10. Lord Ralph Lucas (Conservative)
11. The Lord Inglewood MRICS (Lord William Richard Fletcher-Vane) (Party non-affiliated)
12. Paulette Hamilton MP (Labour)
13. Bob Blackman CBE MP (Conservative)
14. James Wild MP (Conservative)
15. Dr James Davis MP (Conservative)

16. Paul Scully MP (Conservative)
17. Mark Menzies MP (Conservative)
18. Philip Dunn MP (Conservative)
19. Peter Gibson MP (Conservative)
20. Jack Brereton MP (Conservative)

2024 Officers

1. Chair - Chris Clarkson MP (Conservative)
2. Vice-Chair - Paulette Hamilton MP (Labour)
3. Officer - Chris Green MP (Conservative)
4. Officer - Angela Richardson MP (Conservative)

Speakers

Jonathan Carr-West
Mark Sandford

Discussion

Introduction

The Chair welcomed attendees to the Annual General Meeting for the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Local Government and verified that the meeting was quorate. The Chair thanked the secretariat for organising the meeting and gave a brief overview to establish the purpose of the group, which is to bring together interested members of the House of Commons and the House of Lords to discuss and find solutions to issues that are affecting local government.

Election of APPG Officers

During the meeting, the election of APPG officers took place. Chris Clarkson MP was nominated by Rob Butler MP which was seconded by Chris Green MP and he was elected as Chair of the group.

Paulette Hamilton MP was nominated by Chris Clarkson to continue as Vice Chair and was seconded by Julie Marson MP and elected as Vice-Chair.

Chris Green MP was nominated by Sara Britcliffe MP and seconded by Chris Clarkson MP and he was elected as an officer.

Angela Richardson MP was nominated by Paul Holmes MP, seconded by Julie Marson MP and duly elected as an officer.

Discussion summary - LGIU's 2024 State of Local Government Finance report

During a discussion on the LGIU's annual report on Local government finance report on England, Dr Jonathan Carr-West shared some concerning statistics. According to the report, only 4% of councils in England are confident in the financial state of local government this year. More than 50% of councils anticipate issuing 114 notices in the next 5 years to indicate financial risk. Despite some councils appearing to be in a stable financial state, this is often due to the use of reserves, rather than actual financial security (and in fact, more than half of all councils are dipping into their reserves year after year). Currently, 9 out of 10 councils are increasing charges for residents and use of their services, and all but 2 are raising council tax. Residents in Birmingham are already feeling the impact of these measures. Finally, councils claim to have a good workforce, but there is a shortage of experienced people in the pipeline.

He put forward the idea that a few councils going bankrupt could be an individual problem, but if a significant number of councils face financial difficulties, becomes a central government, systemic problem. Dr Carr-West suggested some potential solutions, including the need for multi-year funding schemes and a new funding formula. Consensus-building exercises reflecting alternative funding systems could also be helpful in addressing these issues.

Dr Mark Sandford shared his research on how different countries handle local government funding. He found that Italy, Germany, and Japan have lower property taxes but a lot of assigned revenue. Dr Carr-West noted that all of these countries had significant restructuring after WWII to which Dr Sandford noted that restructuring means you save £20-30 million per county. Local authorities know where their money is coming from year-on-year, which is preferable and stable compared to relying on grants from the central government. There are more checks so that projects which are likely to fail are picked up before they are put through.

During the discussion, Paul Holmes MP highlighted that there are a range of councils in his area where there are disparate scales in which councils function. There could be a way to look at single funding systems which may be a way to address these issues. He also suggested looking into the quality and accountability behind 114 officers.

Sara Britcliffe MP queried issues in Woking and the £700-800 million spent on loans from central government. Her council in Guilford has a list of 50 assets that they are looking to sell off, but they are also concerned about how it will impact the well-being of residents.

Close

The meeting ended with the acknowledgement of the Income and expenditure statement as nil return. The Chair thanked participants for attending the AGM before closing the meeting.