

# Chief executive's bulletin

## Tree charter, planning and climate change events

On Tuesday, we held the latest online event in our [Rebuilding Communities](#) series, expertly facilitated by our project officer, Claire Goldfinch, who has been leading our work on climate change. On the theme of putting trees in the heart of our community, this sold-out event heard from the Woodland Trust about [The Tree Charter](#), how to implement trees and woodland into our local communities, plus an engaging question and answer session on issues including grey squirrels! Do check out some of my [tweets](#) about the event.

Also on Tuesday, I was delighted to announce an additional event focusing on the planning white paper – which has already sold-out! If you missed out this time we will be sharing as much content as possible afterwards. Our next event is on the theme of the climate emergency and how to rebuild greener and more sustainable communities, with speakers including Friends of the Earth. You can find out more about our full programme of events including how to book [here](#).

## Improvement and Development Board

The Improvement and Development Board met for its second virtual meeting on 10 September. Comprising representatives from NALC, county associations, Society of Local Council Clerks, Local Government Association and the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG), the board was established to develop the strategy for, and oversee the operation of, improvement and development initiatives in the local (parish and town) council sector in England. Here's a summary:

- The board discussed a paper by Jonathan Flowers, independent chairman, on the anticipated devolution white paper and helping the government to achieve its aims and what support might be needed
- Organisations shared updates on the COVID-19 response and lessons learnt
- Received updates on wider improvement and development work including NALC's collaboration with the Plunkett Foundation on the forthcoming *The Good Councillor's guide to community business* and with Centre for London on neighbourhood governance.

## Redmond review report published

Sir Tony Redmond has published his report on his [independent review into the oversight of local audit and the transparency of local authority financial reporting](#). I'm pleased NALC's representations have been picked up in the report which recommends the continuation of current arrangements to procure audit, consideration of the proportionality of the current level of external audit work, examine current arrangements for increasing audit activities and fees if a body's turnover exceeds £6.5m, and managing the resource implications for persistent and vexatious complaints. Other proposals a new body to oversee the effectiveness of audit for billing authorities, concerns about the effectiveness of the audit market for principal councils, and a new simplified statement of costs for principal councils. We are following up the report with Sir Tony and other stakeholders including MHCLG.

### **Data protection blog and events**

Understandably, data protection has not been a top priority for most local councils over the last few months. However, with a major data protection judgement recently issued by the courts, Brexit just around the corner, evolving policy rollouts as well as increasing levels of enforcement action taken by the Information Commissioner, it's never been more important for councils of all sizes to ensure they are compliant and set up for success in the future. Timely then that Breakthrough Communications have written this informative [blog](#) and are holding two free virtual briefings in October to help councils understand the questions they need to ask following the court judgement, and a walk through ways to take some of the stress out of being compliant both now and in the future.

### **Change of ministers at MHCLG**

Luke Hall MP has been appointed minister for regional growth and local government following the resignation of Simon Clarke's for personal reasons, with Kelly Tolhurst MP moving from the Department for Transport. Our chairman, Cllr Sue Baxter, has already made contact and meetings are being arranged.

### **MHCLG ministerial webinar and sector call**

Cllr Sue Baxter joined the latest ministerial webinar on 9 September where the focus was on schools reopening and local lockdowns. And our head of policy and communications, Justin Griggs, took part in MHCLG's regular local government sector call on 7 September which covered high street marshals, school transport and transition planning.

## **Labour Coast and Country online conference**

Last Saturday morning Justin joined the Labour Coast and County online conference which heard how Labour plans to prioritise rural and coastal communities, with several shadow ministers among the speakers – as well as two town councillors! There's an interesting write up on [Labourlist.org](https://labourlist.org).

## **And finally...**

The Non-Domestic Rating (Public Lavatories) Bill had its first reading in the House of Lords on Monday and while we await a date for second reading we are already briefing Peers including former president Lord Lytton who we are meeting next week to discuss the bill and other issues.