

Report on ESALC Annual General Meeting and Conference – 4 November 2025

AGM Highlights

Item 7 on the agenda was deferred.

Trevor Leggo expanded on his written report, expressing concern over councillors' reluctance to challenge inappropriate behaviour among peers. He urged vigilance for a government announcement on post-devolution arrangements expected in the New Year.

He clarified the purpose of Neighbourhood Committees, stressing they are non-statutory, not a replacement for Parish Councils, and are intended to increase public engagement and facilitate future unitary authority collaboration.

All Ordinary Resolutions were passed.

Conference Sessions

Katie Bourne – Sussex Police and Crime Commissioner

- Celebrated her 10 years in office and highlighted her achievements, including increased police recruitment.
- Emphasised the dual nature of modern policing: physical and online 'beats'. Online crime is rising, with victims over 75 in Sussex losing an average of £23,000.
- Acknowledged her regret over the earlier reduction in PCSOs and confirmed their numbers are now increasing.
- Encouraged Parish Councils to invite PCSOs to meetings and not assume they are aware of dates.
- Expressed willingness to attend Annual Parish Meetings and confirmed she is campaigning to become Sussex Mayor.
- Took questions from attendees.

Jonathan Owen – Chief Executive, NALC

Provided a forward-looking update on NALC's work and the evolving role of Tier 1 Local Government.

Identified three key challenges: Local Government Reorganisation, Neighbourhood Arrangements, Mayoral Devolution.

Shared lessons from Cornwall and urged Parish Councils to:

- Demonstrate good governance.
- Sign the Civility and Respect Pledge.
- Attract younger councillors (current average age is 61).
- Engage with communities to align precept spending with local needs.
- Raise visibility with MPs and partners.
- Collaborate with other parishes and NALC to ensure representation in future structures.

Warned of reduced discretionary spending and noted that new unitary authorities are not passing on revenue-generating assets.

For concerns about personal safety, Inspector Ollie Fisher of Sussex Police was named as the contact point.

Leigh Whitehouse – Chief Executive, West Sussex Council

Explained West Sussex's preferred proposal for a Sussex and Brighton Combined County Authority.

Proposed timeline:

- Jan–Mar 2026: Government decision on LGR proposals
- May 2026: Mayoral elections
- Autumn 2026: Structural Changes Order
- April 2027 (TBC): WSFRS transfer to Strategic Authority
- May 2027: Shadow unitary elections
- April 2028: New Unitary Council(s) begin service delivery

Steve Tilbury – Planning Update

- Presented three case studies showing the importance of consistent Local and Neighbourhood Plans.
- Noted that despite local plans, planning decisions will be judged against the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF).
- Key statistics: 30% of appealed applications succeed; 60% success rate for large housing developments.
- Highlighted new Traditional and Faster local plan processes requiring quicker parish responses.

- Upcoming National Development Management Policy (NDMP) – watch for updates in the New Year.
- The new mayor will define a Spatial Plan impacting planning decisions.
- Neighbourhood Plans may be phased out due to lack of central funding and perceived delays.
- Emphasised the importance of effort and understanding in planning processes.

Conclusion

The conference provided valuable insights into the evolving landscape of local governance, policing, and planning. I encourage all councillors to review the slides available on the ESALC website and consider how these developments may affect our parish.