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1. Update 17.03.20 - ENGAGING WITH THE GOVERNMENT

On 17 March the government produced an outline of what will be covered by a Coronavirus Bill, which their aim is to introduce as new fast-tracked legislation. Some topics that local councils may find most relevant to their work are related to “managing the deceased with respect and dignity” if the local council is also a burial authority, and also “delaying and slowing the virus” has information regarding delays to elections.

NALC is engaging with Smaller Authorities' Audit Appointments (SAAA) about audit and with the Ministry for Housing Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) as a matter of urgency on a range of issues.

A summary of some of the issues we are raising with MHCLG is below:

- Holding of statutory meetings — such as annual parish meeting and the annual council meeting. We are communicating the concerns that councils have around their ability to hold meetings within the statutory deadlines.
- Audit deadlines — We are communicating the concerns that local councils have around their ability to hold meetings within the statutory deadlines.
- Elections — With the change of date around elections we are seeking clarification on the implications of this.
- Democratic decision-making (e.g. if councils are unable to be quorate for an extended period of time) — We are communicating the difficulties that councils are experiencing or expecting. This includes the question of phone/online attendance

2. Update 16.03.20 - ENGAGING WITH THE GOVERNMENT

On 16 March 2020, local government secretary Robert Jenrick MP addressed over 300 council leaders and sector bodies in a call on the government’s response to coronavirus. He reaffirmed the government’s commitment to supporting councils to focus their efforts on the priority area of social care, providing vital support for vulnerable people and supporting their local economies — read the full press release on MHCLG’s website. NALC is awaiting confirmation that these changes will be applicable to local councils, plus legislation will need to be passed for this to come into effect and we are seeking clarification on the detail. In particular, the MHCLG press release states:

- The deadline for local government financial audits will be extended to 30 September 2020
- It will consider bringing forward legislation to remove the requirement for annual council meetings to take place in person
- It will consider bringing forward legislation to allow council committee meetings to be held virtually for a temporary period