

PRESTON BROOK PARISH COUNCIL

Delivered by email to: jonathan.owen@nalc.gov.uk

**To: Jonathan Owen,
Chief Executive,
NALC, The Bloomsbury Building,
10 Bloomsbury Way, Holborn,
London, WC1A 2SL**

22.10.24

Dear Jonathan,

I am writing on behalf of Preston Brook Parish Council to request advice regarding the attached motions which were submitted to the Cheshire Association of Local Councils (ChALC) for debate at their AGM. Despite submitting the motions prior to the 4 July deadline, we received the attached response from ChALC's Chief Officer on 24 September, some twelve weeks later, advising the motions were not accepted as 'proper'. This censorship has raised concerns about the democratic values of transparency, accountability, and member council participation within ChALC and how it aligns with the principles in NALC's own constitution, which promote fair representation and engagement between councils.

As local councils, our ability to openly debate, amend, and influence the direction of our associations is fundamental to maintaining healthy, democratic processes within the sector. Restricting this participation, as seen in ChALC's approach, limits the voices of member councils and risks concentrating decision-making power without input from a broad spectrum of councils and diverse perspectives. NALC's own Constitution and principles are based on fostering democracy, promoting fair representation, and encouraging councils to engage in collaborative decision-making. However, ChALC's decision to censor motions runs contrary to this ethos, limiting member councils' opportunities to contribute to policy direction. Further, our concerns deepen as Preston Brook Parish Council was not even permitted to participate in the closed-door discussions that excluded our motions, and it is understood that all other motions submitted by Cheshire councils were approved for consideration, which allowed them the chance to be heard by their peers.

The approach taken by ChALC stands in stark contrast to the practices of other county associations, such as the Lancashire Association of Local Councils, which allows all motions submitted by member councils to be placed on the AGM agenda without restriction. We would welcome clarification from NALC on whether this type of restrictive censorship is standard practice and whether there are guidelines that ChALC should be adhering to, especially given the importance of ensuring democratic representation and engagement at the local level.

We also note with concern that it has been reported that the Chief Executive of ChALC spoke strongly against our motions during the closed-door session and allegedly made condescending comments about Preston Brook Parish Council, implying its limited significance in the County. We hope this is not the case, particularly as we now have a councillor from Preston Brook on the Executive Board following the recent elections held last week at the AGM - which, we believe, demonstrates the support our council has from other member bodies and the network our Proper Officer has cultivated among peers in the sector.

Given these concerns, we would appreciate NALC's guidance on how Preston Brook Parish Council can effectively engage with ChALC and influence its policy direction without encountering arbitrary censorship. We are committed to pursuing this matter to ensure that the principles of democracy, transparency, and fair representation are upheld within our county association, and councils like ours to have a meaningful voice and have a genuine ability to influence the strategic direction of their associations.

Thank you for your attention to this matter, and we look forward to your advice.

Yours faithfully,

***Cllr Alan Price
Chairman
Preston Brook Parish Council***