

## Benefits of membership briefing note February 2022

The National Association of Local Councils (NALC) and County Associations have a key national and local role in promoting and supporting local (parish and town) councils including:

- building the sector's reputation with principal councils, national organisations and the media;
- lobbying government and Parliament;
- identifying and sharing good practice;
- improving councils' capacity to do the job;
- providing high-quality advice and guidance, including on legal, finance, planning, housing and other subjects;
- ensuring councils are aware of upcoming legislation and issues of potential interest to them so they can act accordingly.

Some of the direct benefits of membership for local councils are set out below:

- access to, and direct influence over, a national family of county associations and national body working together to help them provide services to their communities, understand the legal and financial framework in which they work, and provide strong national and county voices in the media and to government.
- lobbying and campaigning for policy and other changes to make the work of councils easier, recent successes include:
  - successfully lobbying against the extension of council tax referendum principles to local councils, a continuing battle and priority campaign for flexible and secure funding;
  - exempting public conveniences from business rates, saving councils millions of pounds;
  - successfully lobbying against the requirement to have a Data Protection Officer under data protection legislation, saving councils millions of pounds;
  - setting up a sector-led independent company – Smaller Authorities Audit Appointments Limited – to procure external audit services for our councils to save them significant time and money;
  - successfully slowing the withdrawal of council tax support funding, ensuring over £120 million has been passed on to local councils since 2013;

- ensuring local councils were not overlooked in the Levelling Up the United Kingdom white paper and securing a commitment to review the role and function of local councils and make it easier and quicker to set them up;
  - securing £4.7 million for a Transparency Fund over three years to help smaller councils comply with new transparency rules with funding provided to councils and county associations;
  - impending regulations to increase the number of people required to trigger a parish poll to reduce vexatious use;
  - proposals to extend the remit of the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman to cover local councils;
  - promoting and supporting the role of local councils in devolution and local government reform including a dedicated area on the website, free events and networking between county associations and the development of guidance such as LGA's report Local service delivery and place-shaping: A framework to support parish and town councils.
  - ensuring the continuation of grant funding for councils developing neighbourhood plans;
  - securing measures in the Housing and Planning Act 2016, Neighbourhood Planning Bill 2017 and Planning White Paper to support and strengthen neighbourhood planning;
  - ensuring councils could access some financial support during the Coronavirus pandemic including the job retention scheme and deferment of loan payments.
- an extensive package of work to better support and engage with larger councils, including a cap on fees, extending the Direct Access Scheme to more councils, establishing new National Networks for Super Councils and Coastal Communities, access to LGA associate membership (this can only be accessed through membership of NALC), eHub to facilitate online networking and sharing of information and practice, greater involvement with national work and meetings with government including ministers, new events such as access to parliamentary receptions, the introduction of roundtables and leadership development events with LGA, and study tours to larger councils to share best practice, engagement in LGA peer reviews;
  - up-to-date advice and guidance through member-only websites, publications such as our national magazine LCR, toolkits and conferences on an extensive range of subjects including devolution, securing external funding, neighbourhood planning, affordable housing, procurement, and using social media; our website had over 625,000 page views last year and over 3000 people attended our online events.

- to improve your council and enhance the skills of councillors and clerks, including through nationally agreed training such as the Certificate in Local Council Administration, participating in the Local Council Award Scheme, councillors benefitting from other National Improvement Strategy initiatives such as the Good Councillors Guides – including new guides on transport planning, community business and cyber security – and attending personal development and training events;
- access to advice on financial and audit matters through collective procurement of audit services, using the regularly updated practitioners guide to audit, Good Councillors Guide to finance and transparency and model financial standing orders;
- up-to-date information on the legal and financial framework in which councils work including access to model standing orders and over 100 legal topic notes and briefings;
- written and telephone advice from a dedicated resource of highly experienced solicitors and an external expert on finance and audit; our team dealt with around 600 queries last year;
- advice and guidance on your role as employers including model documents on everything from contracts, disciplinary procedures and performance management, to recruitment and pay plus access to the popular Good Councillors Guide to employment;
- access to several new national networks on climate emergency and coastal communities for councils and for women, LGBT+ and young councillors;
- communications advice and guidance including media relations, marketing and help with crisis communications;
- access to a range of sector-specific commercial suppliers including tailored products for local councils.