# Chairs report October 2026

This has been a busy and challenging year for LALC, but also one in which the commitment of our staff, committees and members has been clear. Throughout a period of change and uncertainty, our staff team has continued to provide professional advice and support to clerks and councillors. I would like to begin by thanking them for their hard work and dedication to our membership.

LALC's work this year demonstrates the value of a collective voice for parish and town councils. Alongside our day-to-day support for members, we have represented their concerns through NALC, worked with MPs and Lancashire County Council, and progressed discussions about the future of our Association. Although some matters remain unresolved, we have built relationships and maintained a clear focus on members' interests.

The announcement of the proposed unitary boundaries in July was swiftly followed by a pause in progress. At the time of writing, we have received no further details. Our current understanding is that district and parish elections, where scheduled, will take place next May.

This uncertainty makes LALC's role in representing and supporting parish and town councils extremely valuable. Our work to raise the Association's profile and prepare for possible changes is being led by the Chief Officer, who will provide an update in her report.

During the year, there have been four Executive Committee meetings and six Finance and Management Committee meetings. I thank committee members for the time and care they have given to the Association's work.

The Finance and Management Committee has added personnel matters to its remit. Staff whose contracts had come to an end have left the Association, and the remaining team has been reviewing its roles and identifying where additional support may be needed later in the year. Options include improvements to IT systems, short-term contracts and specialist contractors; no final decisions have yet been made.

We have also adapted the staff handbook supplied by Bright HR, LALC's contracted HR support provider.

Although the Treasurer's position remains vacant, the office team has produced excellent accounts, which have been scrutinised by the Finance and Management Committee.

That scrutiny has informed the fees proposal set out in the accompanying paper. LALC has not increased its fees for nine years. To continue providing the standard of advice and support that members expect, we need a sustainable financial basis and cannot continue drawing on reserves to meet our running costs.
Unlike many other county associations, LALC does not currently receive financial support from county, unitary or district councils. The proposed fees therefore need to be considered in the context of maintaining a reliable and effective service for our members.
Developing the Association

A number of task and finish groups have worked on specific priorities this year. The Way Forward group began its work after the Executive Committee agreed to consult members on a possible move to a company limited by guarantee. The consultation pack and PowerPoint presentation were agreed at the September Executive meeting and passed to District Area Committees for presentation to their members. Online sessions were also offered. Although attendance was limited, a number of parish and town councils have responded. Members' views are an important part of considering the Association's future.

The Energy, Environment, Planning and Growth group has focused on the route of the Morgan and Morecambe offshore wind project through Lancashire, working with MPs and NALC to raise members' concerns.

A significant step was the adoption of LALC's motion at NALC's AGM last year. This brought the issue into NALC's national work, including lobbying and correspondence during the year. In Lancashire, we have also pursued the matter through meetings, lobbying and correspondence.

The September decision was disappointing and was not the outcome we had sought. However, LALC continues to raise concerns, work with the local press and support engagement with groups on the Fylde opposing the chosen route. The links established with MPs' staff provide a useful foundation for further work. Our experience with NALC has also helped clarify what can be achieved through national representation and where continued local action is needed.

The Improving our Highways and Byways group is due to begin work next month. Issues raised so far include maintenance, the Love Clean Streets app, and public understanding of which bodies are responsible for particular concerns, including the police's role in parking and speeding matters. The group will provide a focus for examining these issues and bringing members' concerns together.

District Area Committees remain a key part of LALC, providing local connections across the Association's area of Palatine Lancashire. They operate within the Blackburn unitary authority, Greater Manchester, Merseyside and Lancashire County Council areas, with their own meeting schedules and links to district, unitary, county or metropolitan authorities. Committees are active in most of our geographical area. There are currently no parish or town councils in the Blackpool unitary authority area.

LALC has participated in a new Lancashire County Council working group intended to improve communication between its Civic Pride directorate and our membership. This has provided a useful opportunity to put forward members' views and develop communication with the County Council.
LCC has also launched its Civic Pride Charter, which is intended to sit alongside the updated Parish and Town Council Charter once the revised version is agreed.
As Chair, I met Councillor Ella Worthington, whose responsibilities include Civic Pride and Safety and engagement with parish and town councils. With a number of communities in West Lancashire exploring the creation of parish or town councils, I highlighted NALC's toolkit and passed on the link to support those discussions.

During the year, I attended three NALC assemblies, four Policy Committee meetings and three Smaller Councils Committee meetings, most of them online. Minutes are available online for members who would like to follow these discussions in more detail.
Key topics have included Project Keystone, NALC's strategic review of its future role and direction. This work, which is nearing completion, is intended to agree priorities for supporting parish and town councils.

NALC has also reaffirmed its commitment to improving the local government standards regime, including sanctions for poor behaviour. Councils are encouraged to sign the Civility and Respect Pledge.

Other discussions have covered the revised National Planning Policy Framework and its implications for parish and town councils' involvement in planning, including concerns about the removal of district councillors' ability to call in applications. The withdrawal of neighbourhood planning grant funding has also been considered; in some areas, district councils have provided assistance.

Local government reorganisation has featured prominently in discussions, although no actions were agreed while the process remains on hold.

I would like to thank our staff, Executive Committee, Finance and Management Committee, District Area Committees and task and finish group members for their contributions throughout the year. Their work enables LALC to provide practical support and represent the interests of parish and town councils.

My particular thanks go to Laura Worden and her team for arranging today's conference in this memorable venue, and to Laura for her support throughout the year.

There are challenges ahead, but we also have much to build on: a committed staff team, active members and relationships that help us put parish and town councils' concerns before local and national decision-makers. Our focus remains on supporting members, strengthening the Association and ensuring that their voices continue