

Benefits of Membership briefing note – August 2017

The National Association of Local Councils (NALC) and County Associations have a key national and local role 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 a strong national voice 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 referenda principles to local councils, a continuing battle and priority campaign;
 - setting up an 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;
 - 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 ombudsman to cover local councils;
 - persuading the Treasury to consider giving the sector a share of business rates and exempting public conveniences from business rates through the Local Government Finance Bill with powers for principal councils to provide relief to local councils from 2018, followed by an amendment secured to provide mandatory relief;

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- new work to promote and support the role of local councils in devolution including during the passage of the Cities and Local Government Devolution Act 2016, a dedicated area on the website, a free joint conference with the Local Government Association and development of new guidance such as our Devo Local toolkit and case studies;
 - securing government funding for councils getting involved in Our Place, financial support for county associations and communities through the new councils programme (£1m) and a continuation of grant support for councils to develop a neighbourhood plan (£22.5);
 - securing measures in the Housing and Planning Act 2016 and Neighbourhood Planning Bill 2017 to support and strengthen neighbourhood planning;
 - our Lobby Day has increased engagement with Parliamentarians and the All Party Parliamentary Group on local democracy has championed our issues in Parliament including through debates and questions and held sessions with government ministers including DCLG's secretary of state.
- an extensive package of work to better support and engage with larger councils, including a new fees cap at £1750, extending the Direct Access Scheme to 500 local councils, establishing a new national 'Super Councils Network' including LGA associate membership (this can only be accessed through membership of NALC), establishing and facilitating new 'coastal towns' and 'coalfield communities' special interest groups, an 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, introduction of roundtables and leadership development events with LGA, a dedicated conference for larger councils, and from 2018 a new study tour to a larger council to share best practice;
 - up-to-date advice and guidance through member only websites, publications such as our national journal 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 350,000 page views last year;
 - to improve your council and enhance the skills of councilors 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 neighbourhood planning as well as finance and transparency – and attending personal development and training events;
 - access to advice on financial and audit matters through collective procurement of audit services, using the practitioners guide to audit, 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 around 110 legal topic notes and briefings;
 - written and telephone advice from a dedicated resource of three highly experienced solicitors and an external expert on finance and audit; our team dealt with around 650 queries last year;
 - communications advice and guidance including media relations, marketing and help with crisis communications;
 - advice and guidance on your role as employers on everything from contracts, disciplinary procedures and performance management, to recruitment and pay; last year we published an updated version of the popular Good Councillors Guide to employment.

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