

# ANNUAL REPORT

## 2008/09

SODC  
Benson Lane  
Crowmarsh Gifford  
Wallingford Oxon  
OX10 8HQ

01491 823118  
[www.oalc.org.uk](http://www.oalc.org.uk)  
[oalc@btconnect.com](mailto:oalc@btconnect.com)

# **OXFORDSHIRE ASSOCIATION OF LOCAL COUNCILS**

## **ANNUAL REPORT 2008/09**

This report covers the thirty-fifth year of the Association since local government reorganisation in 1974.

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## **HONORARY OFFICERS**

<b>President:</b>	Cllr M J Leeding
<b>Vice-Presidents:</b>	Mr L R Angel, IPFA Mr R E Everitt Cllr J F Faulkner Cllr J J Grantham Mr P MacGregor, BEM
<b>Chairman (Executive Committee)</b>	Cllr P Biggs
<b>Vice-Chairman (Executive Committee)</b>	Cllr B E Lane
<b>Hon Treasurer</b>	Mr L R Angel, IPFA
<b>Secretary</b>	Mr B Spragg
<b>Representatives on the National Association of Local Councils:</b>	
- NALC Council and AGM	Cllr M J Leeding
- NALC AGM only	Cllr D J Randell
- NALC Council (deputy) & AGM	Cllr Charlton

## **EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE**

### **1. *The Honorary Officers***

President, Vice-Presidents and Hon Treasurer, as above

### **2. *Parish Council Representatives***

<b>Cherwell District:</b>	Cllr A F Flux Cllr B E Lane Cllr D. Wood (from October 2008) (2 vacancies)
<b>Oxford City:</b>	(1 vacancy)
<b>South Oxfordshire District:</b>	Mr. R. Beattie Cllr D B Fletcher Cllr K Hall Cllr M J Leeding Cllr J Stimson (until March 2009) (1 vacancy)

**Vale of White Horse District:**

Cllr P Biggs  
Cllr R I H Charlton  
Cllr D J Randell  
Cllr G. B. Rogers  
(1 vacancy)

**West Oxfordshire District:**

Cllr. H Burton (from January  
2009)  
Cllr J J Grantham  
Mrs. C Hitchens  
Cllr Dr F W Wright  
(1 vacancy)

**3. Co-opted**

(None)

**4. *Representatives of County and District Councils***

**Oxfordshire County Council:**

Cllr R Jelf

**Cherwell District Council:**

Cllr N. Godwin (until June 2008)

**South Oxfordshire District Council:**

Cllr. Mrs. P. Dawe

**Vale of White Horse District Council:**

Cllr R Farrell

**West Oxfordshire District Council:**

Cllr D Cotterill

## **REPRESENTATIVES ON OUTSIDE BODIES**

<b>Organisation</b>	<b>Representative</b>
Association of Councils in the Thames Valley Region (ACTVaR)	Mr R E Everitt
Cherwell Community Partnership	Cllr. B. Lane
Oxfordshire Partnership	Cllr R I H Charlton Cllr K W N George Mrs C Hitchens Cllr M J Leeding Cllr D Wood
Oxfordshire Play Partnership	Mr R Beattie
Oxfordshire Playing Fields Association	Mr R Beattie
Oxfordshire Public Rights of Way Monitoring Group	Cllr J H Griffin
Oxfordshire Rural Community Council - Executive Committee	Cllr D J Randell Mrs C Hitchens
- Village Halls Advisory Group	Cllr B E Lane
Oxfordshire Rural Forum	Cllr R I H Charlton Cllr M J Leeding
Oxfordshire Rural Transport Partnership	Cllr M J Leeding
Oxfordshire Transport Forum	Cllr M J Leeding
Primary School Provision Review Board	Cllr Mrs G Bindoff
River Thames Alliance	Cllr P Biggs
Rural Health & Well-Being Network	Cllr M J Leeding
Rural Issues Group	Cllr. M J Leeding
Rural Social & Community Programme Review Group	Cllr M J Leeding
South East Region County Associations Forum	Cllr D Randell
South Oxfordshire Partnership	Cllr K Hall

South Oxfordshire Community Safety Partnership	Cllr K Hall
Vale of White Horse Partnership	Cllr R I H Charlton
West Oxfordshire Network – LEADER+ Steering Group	Cllr Dr F W Wright

## INTRODUCTION

We continue to respond on behalf of our members to the changes and initiatives taking place nationally, regionally and locally. These include monitoring and responding to consultations on the Government's legislative programme for local government and the consequences for parish and town councils, for example, the granting of the power of 'wellbeing' to some local councils. We actively participate in the affairs of our national body, NALC, to keep abreast of these changes and protect the interests of the Association. We also respond to the 'regional agenda' through networks such as the South East Region County Associations Forum (SERCAF) and the Association of Councils in the Thames Valley Region (ACTVaR). We also lobbied for a voice to be retained for local councils in the new regional structures that followed the abolition of the South East England Regional Assembly in April 2009.

We participate in county and district local strategic partnerships, as well as a wide range of other partnerships working to improve services and conditions in parishes, such as the Rural Health & Well-Being, and Parish Transport Representatives Networks, and the Oxfordshire Rural Transport Partnership. We have been active in responding to changes affecting local services, such as the Post Office Network, and the Primary Schools Provision Review.

We held a meeting with the ten larger local councils whilst we also deepened our work with Parish Meetings. We organised another forum with them in November last year, at which we launched three specially commissioned Information Notes for Parish Meetings.

This report covers the second year of office of the Committee elected for the four years to 2011. We would like to thank all those who have served over this year for their support. We would like especially to thank our Vice-Chairman and our Treasurer. Bernard Lane, in addition to his duties as Vice-Chairman, has been active in representing our interests on the Cherwell Community Partnership. Les Angel, our Hon. Treasurer has efficiently managed our financial affairs. Finally, we would like to thank the staff at our County office as well as those in the National Association.

We commend this report to our member councils.

Malcolm Leeding  
President

Peter Biggs  
Chairman

June 2009

## **ISSUES**

Representing the interests of member parishes is a key role of our Association, at national and local levels.

### ***National Issues***

Through our representation on the Council of NALC we have been kept up-to-date on the legislative developments that do, or could impact on local councils, such as the Sustainable Communities Act and the Community Empowerment White Paper. Through NALC the Association has lobbied on the potential threat to GP Pharmacy services from proposals in the Pharmacy White Paper. These have now been withdrawn.

The application of the internet to the planning process has been reflected in the development of the government-sponsored 'planning portal', for the electronic submission and consultation on planning applications. One of the ways of ensuring that members, particularly small parish councils, are not disadvantaged by this approach is to assist them in identifying and meeting their IT needs. The Association, with the Oxfordshire Partnership for Local Councils, has submitted a funding proposal to help us do this.

At a regional level, OALC participated in a Government consultation event on the review of sub-national government and planning structures. This was followed up with a formal response to the consultation requesting that town and parish councils would be represented in the new regional structures, as they were in the old. Unfortunately, this has not been taken-up.

### ***Local Issues***

With ORCC, we have continued to be represented in the County Council consultations on Primary School provision. We have also continued to be briefed on preparations for a Pandemic flu outbreak, publicising the Oxfordshire County Council / Oxfordshire NHS Primary Care Trust booklet, and the wider emergency planning needed, down to parish and town level. We have also been represented at consultations or events on the Thames Water Resources Management Plan, the Thames Valley Police Authority, and youth volunteering.

The Association is also a member of the county and district-level community Partnerships, and partnerships on specific topics, such as the Oxfordshire Play Partnership. Play has been an important focus this year with an increased level of funding capital available to support new projects, many of which have or will involve our members. The Association also issued a Good Practice Note on Play Policy drawn up in collaboration with the Oxfordshire Play Partnership, OPFA and the County Council.

The Association continues to participate in wider rural development activities in Oxfordshire, e.g. the Parish Transport Representative Network. The Association also participates in the County & District Parish Liaison events.

## **INFORMATION, ADVICE AND TRAINING**

### ***Information and Publications***

We completed our move towards circulating material in a timelier manner as soon as it becomes available, on our website ([www.oalc.org.uk](http://www.oalc.org.uk)), and via email, with the publication of a regular *Update for Members*. We published three Information Notes for Parish Meetings covering Functions & Finance, Meetings and Procedures, and Chairman & Committees. These were launched at a briefing forum in November 2008.

These communications are our main contact with member councils outside general meetings and training events. They also lead to requests for other publications covering a wide range of issues – finance, meetings and decisions, Members' issues, powers, employment conditions of Clerks, etc.

### ***Advice***

The demand for advice continues to run at a high level, with enquiries from members running at around 60 a month. Many of these are dealt with as they come in over the telephone or by email. Others may require further research or the opinion of NALC's legal service.

Ten parish and town councils that meet NALC's definition of a 'larger local council' are given direct access to NALC for legal advice.

### ***Training Programme***

The Association, with its partners in the Oxfordshire Partnership for Local Councils, provides a wide range of training to councillors and clerks. A number of successful OALC-led training events were held. In addition to specialist courses for Councillors (How to Be a Better Councillor and Chairmanship), we organised seminars on Local Council Powers & Duties, Finance, and Planning, as part of a suite of three events covering the range of knowledge and skills which clerks need to obtain the Certificate in Local Council Administration. The Finance seminar was presented by Peter Lacey, NALC's Chief Finance Advisor. The planning event was led by planners from West Oxfordshire District Council.

We have also initiated training in the new Power of Wellbeing, with a session run with Little Milton Parish Council. Advice and mentoring was provided to candidates for the Certificate in Local Council Administration. 11 Oxfordshire candidates have now been awarded the Certificate.

### ***Quality Status***

Nationally, there are now over 600 Quality Councils. The county accreditation panel, which is chaired and serviced by the Association, considered a successful application for Quality status from Little Milton Parish Council. It now follows Barford St. Michael & St John Parish, and Charney Bassett Parish Councils, Bicester, Carterton, and Didcot Town Councils as the sixth local council to achieve Quality

status in Oxfordshire. Carterton Town Council was also the first member to gain reaccreditation as a Quality Council.

## **LOAN SANCTION**

We collect and process applications for loan sanction – permission to borrow money – from all parish and town councils in Oxfordshire. Once checked by the Association, applications are forwarded directly to the Department of Communities and Local Government to be granted sanction.

In 2008/09 five councils in Oxfordshire borrowed £324,900 in total, compared with just one council borrowing £3,400 in the previous year.

## **THE ASSOCIATION**

### ***Membership***

A total of 250 Oxfordshire parishes, 23 of them without parish councils, were in membership in 2008/09. This means 91% of local councils were in membership.

### ***Office Services***

Our website ([www.oalc.org.uk](http://www.oalc.org.uk)), has become an important means of keeping members up to date with the latest news, consultations, etc., and supplements our regular *Update for Members*. To provide this information to members, we have access to many resources and information services. This year we joined the Rural Services Network, which as well as providing an intelligence service on rural issues, lobbies to promote the interests of predominately rural counties.

### ***County Association Meetings***

At the Annual General Meeting in June 2008, we had a presentation from the Deputy Director of the Planning Portal, the Government's on-line resource for information and guidance on planning and building regulations. The Planning Portal has developed a web-based solution to help the planning consultation process using the e-Consultation Hub. The meeting also provided the opportunity to raise concerns over the technical difficulties that members, particularly smaller councils, could encounter using this system.

At the Winter General Meeting in November, members received a presentation from the Business Continuity Manager at the Emergency Planning Unit, Oxfordshire County Council on Parish Emergency Plans & Planning for a Flu Pandemic, an issue that has continued to grow in importance. In October, 2008 we held the first of our re-launched meetings for larger Local Councils, whilst at the other end of the scale, as previously mentioned, we also held a briefing forum for Parish Meetings in November.

### ***Regional Issues***

Cllr. David Randell was the Association's representative on the South East Region County Associations Forum (SERCAF). SERCAF's role is being kept under review as the implications of the new regional government structures become clearer.

Mr Everitt represented our County Association at meetings of the Association of Councils in the Thames Valley Region (ACTVaR). This is a sub-regional grouping of principal authorities in Berkshire, Buckinghamshire and Oxfordshire, with representatives of the three County Associations in the area attending as observers. Issues discussed during the year included the review of Sub-national Economic Development & Regeneration, which has implications for the future role of ACTVaR, the Thames Water's Water Resources Management Plan, the Draft Thames River Basin Management Plan, direct voting for Police Authority representatives, and the retention of River Thames lock keepers.

Cllr Peter Biggs is our representative on the River Thames Alliance. This organisation brings together local government, the Environment Agency, tourism interests, river users, etc. to improve planning, investment and facilities along the river. The Association has also been involved in the consultation events around Thames Water's Draft Water Resources Management Plan

We are also represented on local partnerships such as the Oxfordshire Partnership, the Cherwell Community Partnership, the Vale of White Horse Partnership and the South Oxfordshire Partnership and Community Safety Partnership.

### ***National Association***

Cllr Leeding represented our County Association at meetings of the Council of the National Association. He was also a member of the Policy Committee and the Liaison Group with the Society of Local Council Clerks.