

ANNUAL REPORT

2009/10

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OXFORDSHIRE ASSOCIATION OF LOCAL COUNCILS

ANNUAL REPORT 2009/10

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

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HONORARY OFFICERS

President:	Cllr M J Leeding
Vice-Presidents:	Mr L R Angel, IPFA Mr R E Everitt Cllr J F Faulkner Cllr. K George CBE Mr J J Grantham Mr P MacGregor, BEM
Chairman (Executive Committee)	Cllr P Biggs
Vice-Chairman (Executive Committee)	Cllr B E Lane
Hon Treasurer	Mr L R Angel, IPFA
Secretary	Mr B Spragg
Representatives on the National Association of Local Councils:	
- 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*

Cherwell District:	Cllr A F Flux MBE Cllr R Jelf (from July 2009) Cllr B E Lane Cllr D. Wood (1 vacancy)
Oxford City:	(1 vacancy)
South Oxfordshire District:	Mr. R. Beattie Cllr D B Fletcher BEM Cllr K Hall Cllr M J Leeding (1 vacancy)

Vale of White Horse District:

Cllr P Biggs
Cllr R I H Charlton
Cllr A Lawrence (from January 2010)
Cllr D J Randell
Cllr G. B. Rogers

West Oxfordshire District:

Cllr H Burton
Mrs C Hitchens
Cllr Dr F W Wright
(2 vacancies)

3. Co-opted

(None)

4. *Representatives of County and District Councils*

Oxfordshire County Council:

Cllr R Jelf (to July 2009)
Cllr. P B Jones (from July 2009)

Cherwell District Council:

Cllr Hallchurch

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

Organisation	Representative
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 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
River Thames Alliance	Cllr P Biggs
Rural Services Network	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 Strategic Partnership	Mrs C Hitchens

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 Sustainable Communities Act and consultations from Communities and Local Government on local democracy.

We actively participate in the affairs of our national body, the National Association of Local Councils (NALC), to keep abreast of these changes and protect the interests of the Association, as well as raising concerns of our member councils. We have been active in responding to possible national changes affecting local services, such as the impact on rural schools of the review of the Dedicated Schools Grant.

We also responded 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). Following changes in regional government ACTVaR has been disbanded.

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 that for Parish Transport Representatives.

This report covers the third 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 former 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 and the Village Halls Advisory Group. 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 2010

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 Amendment Bill, now Act. OALC supported the campaign for this Bill to be passed. This amended the Act to require that parish and town councils are included on the panels of representative local people that principal authorities have to consult to try and reach agreement for schemes that they consider would promote the sustainability of their local communities. Parish and town councils will now be formally included in that process.

OALC responded to NALC's draft response to the Communities and Local Government *Strengthening Local Democracy* consultation and as a result the bulk of the Association's comments on Local Strategic Partnerships had been included in the response to Government.

NALC has also been asked to clarify whether or not local councils will be able to participate in the proposed National Employment Saving Trust scheme to be launched in 2012, and then provide briefings for members.

The Association responded to a request from the Commission for Rural Communities (CRC) on a call for evidence on rural schools. The CRC provided the Department for Children, Schools and Families with information, data and evidence to ensure that rural issues are understood and taken into account during the review of the Dedicated Schools Grant. A joint response had been prepared with the help of Cllr. Gill Bindoff from Lewknor Parish Council, in conjunction with ORCC.

OALC has been closely involved in the discussions around the review of NALC – County Association relationships and NALC's business plan, which is ongoing.

As discussed below, many local issues raised by members which cannot be resolved locally are taken to the national level through NALC.

Local Issues

Local issues raised by members taken to the national level through NALC are described below:

- Following a request from a member council, the Association formally requested NALC to lobby for changes in burial legislation to allow parish council to enter into some form of joint arrangement with the church to enable them to manage and maintain a churchyard. NALC were also asked to extend their current

lobbying of Government to retain the option of paying by cheque and to create a safe system to enable electronic payments for those councils that wish to use this method.

- Following a request from a member, NALC has now adopted a policy on consultation procedures by local planning authorities on 'cross border' applications. This urges District and Unitary authorities to consult all parishes affected by planning applications, not just those in their own area.
- OALC also supported a member's call for assistance in seeking a role for parish councils as a consultee on HGV operator licence applications. NALC had already recognised this problem and were lobbying the Government to make parish councils statutory consultees
- We have also continued to be briefed on preparations for a Pandemic flu outbreak and other disruptive events, and the wider emergency planning needed, down to parish and town level.

The Association is a member of the county and district-level community Partnerships, and partnerships on specific topics, such as the Oxfordshire Play Partnership. Play has continued as an important focus this year with capital funding available to support new projects, many of which have or will involve our members. Local councils have been urged to give full consideration to adopting the Play Policy which had been prepared by the County Council and endorsed by OALC.

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

INFORMATION, ADVICE AND TRAINING

Information and Publications

We circulate material in a timely manner as soon as it becomes available, on our website (www.oalc.org.uk), and via email, with the publication of a regular *Update for Members*. This covers National and Local News; Consultations; Funding; Training & Development; NALC Briefings; Events, and Vacancies. Many key NALC and OALC guidance documents are now also available to download in the Members' Area of our website.

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.

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

Training and Development Programme

The Association, with its partners in the Oxfordshire Partnership for Local Councils, provides a wide range of training and development activities with councillors and clerks. A number of successful OALC-led training events were held. We organised seminars on Local Council Powers & Duties, Finance, and Planning, 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 also ran a 'Year End Accounts' Training Workshop run by specialists from one of the market leaders in the provision of accounting services to parish councils. It was a practical event where delegates arrived with their books and other related documentation and left with a draft set of accounts and annual return figures to complete at their convenience.

We also launched an initiative for new clerks - *Oxfordshire Working with New Clerks*. This provides a mentoring and support programme where new clerks are put in touch with mentors who are experienced clerks from similar sized councils. In addition we also hold regular training/networking meetings hosted by the District Councils around the County. The first of these focussed on a Best Practice Guide to Minutes. We have also created a "new clerks" section in the Members' area of the OALC website which will offer another special resource.

Advice and mentoring was also provided to candidates for the Certificate in Local Council Administration. 12 Oxfordshire candidates have now been awarded the Certificate.

Quality Status

Nationally, there are now nearly 700 Quality Councils. The county accreditation panel is chaired and serviced by the Association. There are five local councils in Oxfordshire with Quality status: Little Milton and Charney Bassett Parish Councils, and Bicester, Carterton, and Didcot Town Councils. Little Milton Parish Council became the first local council in Oxfordshire and the third in the country to become qualified to exercise the power of well-being.

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 2009/10 ten councils in Oxfordshire borrowed £1,230,000 in total, compared with five councils borrowing £324,900 in the previous year.

THE ASSOCIATION

Membership

A total of 255 Oxfordshire parishes, 27 of them without parish councils, were in membership in 2009/10. This means 92% of local councils were in membership.

Office Services

Our website (www.oalc.org.uk), is 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. In addition to the National Association, these include the South East Employers organisation and 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 2009, we had a presentation from Ian Travers-Smith, Business Continuity Manager at the Emergency Planning Unit, Oxfordshire County Council on a model Parish Council Emergency Plan and an update on the swine flu outbreak.

At the Winter General Meeting in November, members received a presentation from Paul Neary, representing the Allotments Regeneration Initiative (ARI), on providing and managing allotments. ARI aim to provide technical and practical assistance in several general areas: Strategy; Management; Organisations and Associations; Administration; and Project Management. A copy of the material that Mr Neary provided was placed in the Members' Area of the OALC website.

We continued with our meetings with Larger Local Councils, attended by NALC's Larger Councils' Development Officer. One of these included a briefing on the implementation of the Power of Wellbeing. At the other end of the scale, we held a briefing event for Parish Meetings on planning matters, led by Planning Aid South.

Regional Issues

Cllr. David Randell with Cllrs. Biggs and Leeding were the Association's representatives on the South East Region County Associations Forum (SERCAF). SERCAF's role is being kept under review as the implications of 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 was 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. ACTVaR has now been wound up following the outcome of the review of Sub-

national Economic Development & Regeneration. Cllr. Charlton has represented the Association at events on the future of water supplies in the sub-region.

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.

We are represented on local partnerships such as the Oxfordshire Partnership, and the four rural district partnerships. We are also represented on play issues by Mr. Beattie on the Oxfordshire Play Partnership and the Oxfordshire Playing Fields Association.

National Association

Cllr Leeding represented our County Association at meetings of the Council of the National Association. He is also a member of the Policy Committee.