



# **ANNUAL REPORT**

**1<sup>st</sup> April 2025 - 31<sup>st</sup> March 2026**

This report covers the seventy ninth year of the Association since its formation in 1947

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## HONORARY OFFICERS

<b>President</b>	Deputy Lieutenant Lynda Atkins
<b>Chairman (Executive Committee)</b>	Cllr Katharine Keats-Rohan
<b>Vice-Chairman (Executive Committee)</b>	Cllr Bill Pattison
<b>Hon Treasurer</b>	Cllr Mahmood Ebrahimjee
 <b>Representatives on the National Association of Local Councils:</b>	
NALC National Council and AGM	Cllr Katharine Keats-Rohan
NALC AGM only	President, Chair and one other
NALC National Council deputy	Cllr Bill Pattison
<b>County Officer</b>	Lucy Dalby
<b>Asst. County Officer</b>	Rachel Brown
<b>Finance Officer</b>	Karen Wheeler

## EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

### 1. The Honorary Officers September 2023 – 2027 four-year term of Executive Committee

President, and Hon  
Treasurer, as above

### 2. Parish Council Representatives

- |                                     |  |
|-------------------------------------|--|
| <b>Cherwell District</b>            | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Cllr Maureen Cox, Deddington PC</li><li>• Cllr Dianne Bratt, Adderbury PC</li></ul>                    |
| <b>Oxford City</b>                  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Vacancy</li></ul>  |
| <b>South Oxfordshire District</b>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Cllr Katharine Keats-Rohan, Wallingford Town Council</li><li>• Cllr Bill Pattison, Benson PC</li></ul> |
| <b>Vale of White Horse District</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Cllr Jeanne Lapsley, Letcombe Regis PC</li><li>• Vacancy</li></ul>                                     |
| <b>West Oxfordshire District</b>    | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Cllr Rachel Crouch, Witney TC</li><li>• Cllr Simon Randall, Shipton under Wychwood PC</li></ul>        |

### 3. Representatives of County and District Councils

- |   |                       |
|---|-----------------------|
| <b>Oxfordshire County Council</b>           | Cllr Diana Lugova     |
| <b>Cherwell District Council</b>            | Cllr David Hingley    |
| <b>South Oxfordshire District Council</b>   | Cllr David Rouane     |
| <b>Vale of White Horse District Council</b> | Cllr Andy Foulsham    |
| <b>West Oxfordshire District Council</b>    | Cllr Joy Aitman       |
| <b>Oxford City Council</b>                  | Cllr Dr Chris Smowton |

## ANNUAL REPORT 2025/26 INTRODUCTORY REMARKS

First, I would like to express my thanks to the County Officer, the Assistant County Officer and the Finance Office for the compilation of this report.

Oxfordshire has 251 town and parish council and 68 parish meetings. In 2022-2023 we achieved our highest ever membership of 97% and have maintained that since then. This is testimony to the hard work and invaluable services provided by our officers, offered to all councils who need help or advice. The number of requests for help continues to rise, which is an issue for such a small team. With modestly increased affiliation fees and some operational savings as well as continued extension of training courses, our finances have stabilised in an important outcome for this year. However, we are mindful that the looming decision about local unitarization will add further strains, whatever the outcome, and will impact the structure of OALC.

Major change brings both benefits and disbenefits and we were given a chance to indicate our views in a response to a consultation on Local Government Reform proposals for Oxfordshire. Two key themes to emerge from the responses collated by the County Officer were the importance of maintaining **strong local representation and ensuring that parish and town councils continue to have an effective voice in decision-making**, and the importance of recognising the **different needs of rural communities and urban centres** within Oxfordshire. Both of these are very prominent in the assiduous work of NALC officers engaging with MHLGC on LGR. NALC is working hard, and with some success, in raising the sector's profile in parliament, and also on more formal collaboration with the Local Government Association. It is collating information about experiences of LGR on its new website, which all councillors can access and should find useful.  
<https://www.nalc.gov.uk>

The blizzard of consultations the Policy Committee is responding to is also highlighting the winds of change, which are blowing through NALC as well. It is now working on revamping and enhancing its working relationships with the County Associations.

*Katharine Keats-Rohan, Chair*

**The strategic aims of OALC remain the same; they are to advise, train and inform town and parish councils to enable our member councils to be professional, transparent and responsive to their communities.**

## **Advice**

On a daily basis, OALC staff provide advice, clarification and guidance to clerks and chairs. Many are dealt with within 24 hours. Others may require further research or resources; we use the specialist skills of our employment and financial consultants as appropriate, and we seek the opinion of NALC's legal service as necessary.

We continue to operate a monthly drop in forum. It is an opportunity for councillors to share information, ask questions of each other in a supportive informal environment and hear from OALC about the latest local and national news.

## **Training**

The Association **continues to provide a wide range of training opportunities** for councillors and clerks across the county.

- In 2025/26 we ran 24 events, training in excess of 400 individuals across 135 councils
- 6 councils received dedicated full council training
- 42 individuals benefited from training through our partner trainers Steve Parkinson and Breakthrough Communications

We run a rolling [Certificate of Local Council Administration](#) (CiLCA) mentoring programme. The CiLCA qualification is one of the eligibility criteria for a council to qualify for the [Local Council Award Scheme](#) and also the wide-ranging General Power of Competence. A 'qualified' and professional Clerk means better advice and guidance to the council and councillors.

In the year of this report, we are pleased and proud that at least six Clerks have attained the Certificate in Local Council Administration –

- Cherrie Caruthers – Abingdon Town Council
- Christina Edgar-Hiatt – Burford Town Council
- Anita James – Stanton St John Parish Council
- Sarah Kearney - Kidlington Parish Council
- Nichola Winton – Radley Parish Council
- Sara Underwood – Sonning Common Parish Council

Unfortunately, we are no longer routinely informed when candidates complete CiLCA, so we are certain there are others.

More are still working on completing the qualification.

OALC believes that all councillors and clerks should commit to attending appropriate training each year. This should form part of a commitment to improvement embedded in the council's training policy and with appropriate budgetary provision too.

The national [Local Council Award Scheme](#) (LCAS) is an accreditation scheme for councils. We are very proud of the following member councils who hold the award:

- Chipping Norton Town Council - Quality
- Eynsham Parish Council - Foundation
- Henley-on-Thames Town Council - Gold
- Old Marston Parish Council - Quality
- Witney Town Council - Bronze

We would encourage more councils to gain accreditation. It is a very practical tool encouraging self-examination across three main spheres of council work – Governance, Community and Development.

In preparation for local government reorganisation OALC is keen that more councils at a minimum obtain Bronze level as the need for good governance will be key once Oxfordshire is governed by a unitary council/councils.

Each year NALC runs the [Star Council Awards](#) - they are the only national awards programme in England specifically designed to recognise the contribution of local councils to their communities. The awards are open to all local councils, councillors, young councillors, clerks, and county associations across England. There are five award categories for which entrants can apply:

- Clerk of the Year
- County Association of the Year
- Young Councillor of the Year
- Councillor of the Year
- Council of the Year
- Climate Response of the Year – Henley Town Council were a finalist in this category.

## Information

We provide information to our member councils

- via email and phone
- Through our website ([www.oalc.org.uk](http://www.oalc.org.uk)). Our new website was launched in July 2025, and we have received 12,698 unique visits since then. The portal (members' area) has a variety of references, documents, good practice guides and articles for the exclusive use of member councils
- One of the main methods of communication is our monthly **Update for Members** – with information (national and local), news, consultations, hints, tips, useful advice and job adverts.
- Via our Facebook page where we are gradually building a following and currently have 91 followers <https://www.facebook.com/oxonalc>

## **ISSUES**

Representing the interests of member parishes is an additional role of our Association, at both national and local levels. We continue to attend the twice-yearly Cherwell Town and Parish conferences, meet with OCC on a bi-monthly basis and the County Monitoring Officers quarterly. This year we have undertaken meetings with representatives, of Oxfordshire County Council, Cherwell District Council, Oxford City Council, South and Vale District Councils and West Oxfordshire District Council to discuss the impact of local government reorganisation on the town and parish sector. We have also been in regular contact with Community First Oxfordshire and the Oxfordshire Playing Fields Association to support our mutual members.

## **THE ASSOCIATION**

### **Membership**

The total number of parish councils in membership varies slightly each year. This year we have maintained membership of 97% with 243 out of the 251 Oxfordshire councils. 11 of the 68 Oxfordshire Parish Meetings are also in membership.

### **Staffing and Office**

Lucy Dalby is the County Officer. Rachel Brown is the Assistant County Officer and Karen Wheeler is the Finance Officer.

We continue to invest time and money in our staff, systems and technology to continue to serve our member councils and their changing needs.

We have retained as OALC HR consultant, Chris Moses, Personnel Advice & Solutions on an annual contract to supply employment advice to our member councils. Steve Parkinson continues as OALC's Finance, Audit and VAT consultant. Free access to the advice of both these consultants is highly valued by our member councils.

Chris retired at the end of March 2026, and we have engaged an alternative provision.

### **Services**

The services which we provide for our member councils:

- An extensive, relevant and expanding training programme provided by us and our partners to enable councillors and clerks to be professional, efficient, transparent and representative of their community
- Specialised HR and Employment advice service, started in summer 2014, has provided individual advice to many of our member councils on a wide variety of employment related subjects
- Our Finance, Audit and VAT advice service started in May 2017. This, like the employment advice is an additional and valued service to member councils

- Website [www.oalc.org.uk](http://www.oalc.org.uk) with a member's only area that provides access to legal and financial briefings, good practice guides, presentations and employment briefings
- Telephone and portal advice service on all aspects of council business
- Monthly update with news, legislation, consultation, funding, vacancies
- Representation on local, regional and national bodies which support and lobby for town and parish councils; OALC is recognised as an important stakeholder within the county
- Access to solicitors and financial advice at NALC
- Checking and advising on Public Works Loan Board applications
- Larger Councils twice yearly meetings
- Monthly online forum sessions for councillors.
- Full Council training
- Job evaluations
- MOT of policies and procedures

### **County Association Meetings**

For the first time our 2025 AGM was held in conjunction with our popular Talking Tables event which included the launch of the new website; the Annual Report and Accounts were circulated as usual to all member councils.

The Executive and Policy Committee met virtually quarterly. Cllr Keats-Rohan, as National Assembly representative can take any decisions and issues from OALC directly to NALC meetings.

### **Regional and County Issues**

OALC works hard to maintain good working relationships with officers at all the principal councils and with other organisations such as Community First Oxfordshire and the Oxfordshire Playing Fields Association. With limited staff capacity, we have to prioritise activities which benefit our member councils most.

A number of members of the Executive Committee attend other meetings and organisations in their personal capacity and report on their activities. However, OALC like many other organisations, has to concentrate its efforts on those activities which contribute to the long-term financial stability of the organisation and have direct benefit for our member councils.

### **National Association of Local Councils**

OALC is affiliated to the [National Association of Local Councils](http://www.nalc.org.uk) (NALC). We collect and pay a proportion of the subscription income to NALC to fund their services for member councils.

Cllr Keats-Rohan represents our County Association at meetings of the National Assembly of the National Association of Local Councils (NALC).