

Each year we try to extend the range of support we provide to recognise the increasing complexity of the issues encountered by our member councils. This year has been no exception and the local government financial landscape is unlikely to change in coming years imposing continuing challenges for our communities. Membership of SSALC can be regarded as an insurance arrangement to be used on those occasions when support is required, often at very short notice.

In addition to our day to day legal, financial, procedural and HR advice the SSALC Boards commission projects in response to opportunities that arise. We have, for example, undertaken a major project, piloted in West Sussex, on Health & Wellbeing which is focussed on how local councils and communities can become involved in decision making and influencing outcomes on Public Health and Community Wellbeing. This project has recently been awarded a Star Council Award by NALC. It has been developed such that it can be rolled out into East Sussex & Surrey should there be demand.

Another area of SSALC involvement closely allied to Health & Wellbeing is the encouragement of communities to recognise the needs of former service personnel and their families within the terms of the Military Covenant. As the focal point in their communities, parish councils are well placed to identify veterans and offer support through coffee mornings, befriending schemes and lunch clubs.

With law and order in the headlines and which, through our various training and surveys, has been identified as a high priority for all areas, SSALC devotes considerable time in engaging with the police to raise the profile of community concerns; this ranges from regular direct contact with the Chief Constable and the Police & Crime Commissioner down to response teams working to local Inspectors. Through this mechanism we have ensured that all our communities have direct access to the Chief Constable and are able to make representation on matters of local concern. Recognising that resources available for policing are unlikely to return to previous levels and, policing priorities having shifted in response to crime trends, SSALC works with others to come up with alternatives to fill the gaps on the ground.

In Surrey we have been involved in the SCC's consultation exercise developing a Surrey Vision for 2030 and as part of this raising the profile of Parish Councils. We liaise with County Officers to ensure that Parish Councils receive information that may benefit their Parish.

At a regional level SSALC is part of a 9 County Association Group [SERCAF]; this allows us to work in collaboration with our counterparts from Milton Keynes to Margate to the Isle of Wight sharing experience and expertise in areas affecting the 1600 local councils in the South East.

At a national level we have three representatives sitting on the NALC Assembly examining policy and making representation to Government in support of the Sector. Perhaps the most significant breakthrough has been the Ministerial statement that referendum principles will not be extended to the Sector for the next three years, thus creating greater certainty with parish council budgets. It is tempting to think that more would have been achieved had Brexit not got in the way! NALC has developed a sound working relationship with the Local Government Association on a range of issues that affect local government in general and parish councils in particular.

Our training programme sees a year on year increase in attendance. Feedback suggest that our training is useful and well received. Not only do we provide practical training for Clerks and Councillors, we are able to provide speakers/trainers who deal with more specialist areas of Parish Council work. This also includes speakers from the Police and the County Councils.

As we move towards May 2019 and local council elections SSALC will be there to support member councils; we have already identified dates and locations for 20 training / briefing sessions for new

councillors between May and September in addition to the normal programme of skills training for Clerks, Councillors and Chairmen. Our training can be tailored to suit individual councils or delivered to a cluster of councils; awareness of current issues, challenges and solutions are at the very heart of being an effective council respected by the community and offering residents value for money.

We have over the last year developed our website to ensure that our Members have immediate access to current advice provided by NALC, our Solicitors and Auditor.

Each year the Boards carefully scrutinise our finances when looking at subscriptions. Over the years we have striven to keep our subscriptions as low as possible. We, as with any organisation or business, are subject to increasing costs that are unavoidable. With regard to subscription levels over the next 3 years, we anticipate they will attract an average increase of 5% in order to maintain the standards set by the Boards and to meet the requirements of our Members. We, of course, will continue to look at any opportunities to make savings that we can pass on to Members as we review the subscriptions each year.

We recognise that the nature of Parish Council business requires timely responses. Don't forget we are available up to 7.30pm each working day to address questions that have arisen just before a meeting starts – there are not many other places to go at that time of day when matters become urgent – this includes initial advice from our solicitor which is likely to be free of charge at that stage.