

SERVICE LEVEL AGREEMENT FOR THE PROVISION OF SERVICES TO MEMBER COUNCILS 2024/25



Aims and objectives

This Service Delivery Agreement sets out the arrangements for the servicing, promotion, and representation of member councils by Devon Association of Local Councils Ltd. Trading as Devon Association of Local Councils (DALC). It also defines the working relationship between DALC and the National Association of Local Councils (NALC) in providing services to member councils.

The aim of the Association is to take all such steps as may be necessary or desirable in the interests of member councils:

- a) to protect and promote the interests, rights, functions, and privileges of member councils;
- b) to assist members in the performance of their functions and to promote and develop the social, economic, environmental, cultural, and recreational life of parishes;
- c) to promote widespread and well-informed interest in local government; and
- d) to promote good local government and governance.

DALC's role is to represent the interests of local councils and to provide opportunities for local councils to express their views; it will not attempt to represent the interests of an individual council.

It is generally expected that DALC will comply with the terms of the agreement, however, owing to resource constraints, it is recognised that in some cases the targets set out will not always be met in the first instance. Nevertheless, we are committed to complying with the Agreement in full wherever possible on three key objectives:

1. Ensuring the highest standards of service to member councils
2. Effective promotion and representation of the town and parish council sector in Devon
3. Effective partnership with other bodies and stakeholders including principal councils, government agencies, VCS organisations and others, to deliver information and training in a variety of formats.

The Agreement recognises the distinct and complementary roles of the Devon Association of Local Councils and the National Association of Local Councils.

Glossary of terms

Defined Terms

AGM

DALC, the Association, the County Association

NALC, the National Association

Local Councils

Meaning

Annual General Meeting

Devon Association of Local Councils

National Association of Local Councils

Parish and Town Councils

Service provision

DALC will:

1. Provide a well-resourced office and trained staff able to address and support member councils. The normal office hours are 9am to 2pm Mondays to Thursdays. At the discretion of the County Officer, the Association may provide additional out of hours emergency service to support member councils via telephone and email.
2. Provide advice, information, support, and training, in relation to legislation and procedural correctness, to member councils through email, phone, digital communications, meetings, publications, and training.
3. Provide a framework for consultation and engagement, and develop suitable arrangements for the effective representation and promotion of local councils at the county, regional and national level.

The Association recognises the benefits of the use of digital communications and virtual meetings to provide a faster and more effective service and broad engagement with its membership.

Advisory service

1. In the first instance, queries from member councils should be addressed to the County Association. We will provide a telephone and email service to give general advice regarding council procedures and interpretation of legislation. Queries should be sent by either the Clerk or the Chairman of the Council (or Chairman of a committee where relevant), and advice given shall be intended for the council, and not intended for individual use. Where other council members use the service, responses may be copied to the clerk/chairman for information.
2. We will acknowledge receipt of queries within 3 working days. Whilst we make every effort to provide a quick response to all queries, member councils are encouraged to make the earliest possible contact to help avoid delays in meeting your response times.
3. In the case of more complex queries, DALC may consult NALC's Legal Team. You will be asked to submit your query in writing with any supporting documents. Responses are normally returned to the County Association within 15 working days and forwarded to the member council within 3 working days. We will make every effort to forward responses on the same day.
4. NALC updates, legal topic notes, and legal briefings, will be circulated to member councils as appropriate. They will also be available via the membership restricted part of our website, which may also link to the NALC website. Local Council clerks are encouraged to circulate important information to their councillors.

Policy development and support

DALC will:

1. Consult with member councils as appropriate on issues of national concern and on government consultative documents by circulating papers and initiating discussions through its membership.
2. Take an active part in the development of county, regional and national policy, to represent the interests of local councils in Devon.
3. Take an active role in the lobbying of, and partnership with, principal authorities, other local government bodies, VCS organisations, partner stakeholders and other agencies, to enhance the role of local councils and their ability to deliver services to their communities.

Employment support

DALC will:

1. Offer support and guidance on matters relating to the recruitment and employment of staff.
2. Distribute national advice and guidance on employment issues
3. Refer issues, where appropriate, for further advice, guidance, and support, usually via NALC's HR Partners, Worknest.

Finance Support

DALC will:

1. Provide member councils with local support and guidance on accounting and audit requirements.
2. Distribute national advice and guidance
3. Organise appropriate briefings and training
4. Refer any VAT queries to the Parkinson Partnership Ltd, whom which we have an SLA for professional advice.

Borrowing approval Process

DALC is the body responsible for the checking and submission of Borrowing Approvals by local councils. DALC will:

1. Advise local councils on the submission of borrowing approval applications, providing the current criteria and information available to member councils.
2. Check applications for compliance with government requirements
3. Submit applications directly to the Department for Levelling Up, Housing, and Communities for approval.

Council development

DALC will:

1. Offer guidance and support to member councils to develop their role in the community
2. Offer support and guidance on the implementation of the Local Council Awards Scheme
3. Produce updates and publications to support member councils
4. Organise and participate in development, briefing and training at county, regional and national level for the better delivery of information and training for member councils.

Planning support

DALC will ensure that national information and guidance on planning matters is conveyed to member councils in accordance with that guidance and local knowledge.

Training development and support

DALC will:

1. Organise a comprehensive programme of training provision for member councils including both councillors and staff
2. Deliver tailor-made training events to individual member councils to address local needs. (There will be a charge for this service, which will be agreed in advance.)
3. Work with partners to develop training packages for delivery to local councils.
4. Provide comprehensive support to clerks undertaking the CiLCA qualification. (There will be a charge for this service, which will be agreed in advance.)

Officer support and attendance

Officers are available, by invitation, to attend area meetings of local councils to advise on and discuss topics of concern. DALC will also ensure that, where appropriate, its officers participate fully in the work of the National Association of Local Councils for the benefit of DALC member councils.

The Chairman of the Board of Directors may be invited to attend a ceremonial occasion, or other events, to further the profile of the local councils in Devon.

Attendance at National, Regional and County events

DALC will ensure that, wherever possible, it is represented at all national, regional, and county conferences, seminars, and information events to represent the views of member councils and to inform member councils of the outcomes of such events. The Association also undertakes to deliver similar briefings and seminars at county and/or regional level to ensure the full participation and involvement of member councils. These may be either physical or remote events.

DALC is committed to representing member councils at NALC Conferences where appropriate, and for its appointed NALC representatives to attend the AGM.

The Association will, hold an AGM each year normally in October and this will be combined with an annual conference and a trader's exhibition, unless exceptional circumstances beyond DALC's control render it impossible. The event will deliver briefings and information, training sessions and other activities designed to inform member councils.

DALC will always endeavour to provide a correct and timely response to its members and welcomes comments from its members and suggestions on how it can improve its service.

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