

Cumbria Association of Local Councils 2016

Why CALC Matters

CALC is a key strategic partner to the County Council for the following reasons:

1. 370,00 people in Cumbria live in parishes that are CALC members
2. 97% of Cumbria's parish councils are members of CALC
3. In 2015/16 CALC trained 313 councillors and clerks in a range of subjects
4. Every year, CALC answers over 2,500 enquiries from parish clerks and councillors
5. CALC's monthly newsletter reaches over 1000 parish and town councillors.
6. Each year, CALC organises 19 district association meetings, many of them tripartite, across the county for parish councils to discuss parish issues with County and District officers.
7. CALC maintains, and shares with appropriate organisations, a database of all parish clerks and many parish councillors in Cumbria.

CALC Key Facts

1. CALC has 2 FTE members of staff, including a Chief Officer on 0.6FTE and a Parish Development Officer on 0.4 FTE, plus 3 Parish Liaison Officers on 0.1 FTE each and admin support.
2. Our team covers the whole of Cumbria.
3. CALC has an Executive Committee, which meets 4 times a year, plus AGM. Its members are made up of parish councillors or former parish councillors.
4. CALC's Annual Expenditure: 2015/16 approximately £88,000

CALC's Functions

CALC's key functions for Cumbria's town and parish councils and meetings are to provide:

- Advice
- Training
- Advocacy and Communications

Advice Service

CALC is the only organisation giving full-time support to parish councils in Cumbria to ensure that parish councils are acting within the law. The office in Penrith is open 5 days a week, 9 – 5pm to respond to telephone calls and emails from councillors and clerks. We answer questions on legal, procedural, HR, planning and financial matters.

In addition, CALC produces guidance in plain English on new legislation and regulations, ensuring all our members are well briefed to be compliant with the law. We pass on to parishes information from the National Association of Local Councils and Cumbria's town councils have direct access to the services that NALC provide – including their specialist solicitors.

We signpost advice to complementary organisations in the county, such as ACT and CVS.

Training and development

CALC develops expertise and professionalism in parish councils. Training is central to this.

During 2015/16 CALC delivered 37 development/training sessions including 13 in-house bespoke courses tailored to individual parish councils. We held 10 Clerk's Forums attended by 48 Clerks. CALC has supported 39 clerks Cumbria to attain the professional qualification (Certificate in Local Council Administration) and is currently supporting 5 more clerks over the year long course.

We also deliver training with other organisations across Cumbria. This includes community based training (neighbourhood planning, right to bid, community engagement) with ACT and volunteer coordination with CVS. We work with the District Councils on training too – this year subjects included website building, planning and the code of conduct.

We are currently working with the Lake District National Park Authority to create an on-line planning resource for all parish councils, inside and outside the national park.

Advocacy and Communications

CALC actively promotes parish councils and has been recently successful in helping bring forward two new town councils in Penrith and Whitehaven. CALC representatives attend a wide range of meetings every year to advocate for parishes and to help keep parishes informed about major projects such as Moorside/Nugen, the National Grid's Northwest Connections, broadband, Tidal Lagoon Power, Managing Radioactive Waste Safely, Appleby Fair, Cumbria Flood forum and meetings of the National Parks.

All CALC's work relies on excellent communications with parish councils. We do this in a number of ways including a monthly circular, updating our website regularly including its comprehensive advice section, building a Twitter presence, emailing and speaking to clerks and councillors on the telephone. We assist in times of emergencies – eg providing a single point of contact for other organisations, as in the recent floods.

CALC and the Parishes' Changing Roles

Due to the ongoing reduction in the budgets of principal authorities, the role of parish and town councils is going through a period of change. This can be seen clearly in the growth of the parish precept across Cumbria:

In 2009/10 Cumbrian parishes precepted £3.4 million

In 2014/15 they precepted £5.3 million

Across Cumbria, town and parish councils are transforming the role that they play in their communities. They are now delivering a wide range of services, and managing assets, that formerly would have been delivered by principal authorities. They are also working very differently – with a wide range of partners, in innovative ways eg setting up Community Interest Groups, charitable trusts, helping set up new community groups. This approach is supported by CALC through on-going training and our advice network.

Within communities, parish councils are great strategic partners for this process of change.

Parishes have:

- **Legitimacy** – they are democratically elected local authorities within communities
- **Governance and Financial Probity** – as statutory body they are governed by legislation including financial regulations, they are also subject to annual internal and external audits.
- **Expertise** – parish councils have trained clerks, chairmen and councillors.
- **Tax raising powers** – parish council set their own precepts based on their communities' needs.
- **Transparency and Communications** – recent legislation required all smaller parish councils (turnover under £25,000) to post their accounts online, creating greater transparency and easier methods of communication with them.

CALC Supporting Parishes through Change

As parishes take on more challenges, the role CALC plays in supporting them increases. CALC is best placed to do this because:

- CALC is made up of parish councils and is trusted by them.
- CALC understands the needs of parish councils and communicates with them daily.
- CALC builds capacity within parishes through training, development sessions and advice.
- CALC works with partners (principal authorities, ACT, LDNPA) to help deliver support to changing parish councils
- CALC brings **Leadership** to parish council by helping set parish agendas eg through the Local Council Award Scheme, transparency initiatives, supporting them as they take on more services. These initiatives build community cohesion and resilience across all our communities

Samantha Bagshaw

Chief Officer, CALC