

Report by Cllr J R Scragg

Wiltshire Association of Local Councils (WALC)

This report is based on the report I produced for Community First for their AGM which will be held in Devizes Town Hall on 12th October (commencing 1730hrs). It explains the relationship between the two organisations.

WALC plays an important role in the effective management of local community affairs in Wiltshire and Swindon unitary areas through its support to town and parish councils who are members. This includes the provision of training to councillors and clerks in partnership with various trainers, responding to queries from local councils on legal, procedural and community topics, and keeping councils up to date with changes in legislation and government policy. The Association responded in 2021/22 to the substantial demand for the training of new councillors following the elections in May 2021. WALC provides a channel of communication with the National Association of Local Councils (NALC) which has staff with legal and other expertise to support the sector and represent its interests at government level. WALC's role is entirely consistent with the aims of Community First which supplies the secretariat and all the necessary office and supervisory facilities to WALC. This is provided through a Memorandum of Understanding between WALC and Community First and through the employment of the Local Councils' Adviser (also referred to as the County Secretary), who reports to the Executive Committee of WALC which comprises representatives of member councils. Some of the annual fee paid by member councils to Community First is for the salary of the two WALC members of staff and overheads although another part of the fee goes straight to NALC as WALC collects this on behalf of NALC. Decisions on policy and finance, including the WALC membership fee, are made by the Executive Committee and/or by the Association's AGM.

During 2021/22 the existing Local Councils' Adviser, Katie Fielding, resigned to take up another post and Community First managed the recruitment in April 2022 of a replacement, Deborah Bourne. It also ensured continuity of service in the interim by the employment of a temporary member of staff. More recently, in implementation of a decision by the WALC Executive Committee, Community First successfully recruited a part-time office assistant, Helen Akiyama to support the Local Councils' Adviser.

During 2021/22 WALC membership stayed constant at 230 members from a possible 272 parish and town councils (and also Salisbury City Council) within the unitary areas of Wiltshire and Swindon. This included 10 new councils, replacing 10 Councils who did not renew their membership.

WALC will hold its AGM on 10th October 2021. This will be held in the Village Hall in Avebury. Further details will be issued by Deborah Bourne but any councillor or officer of a member council (including Chippenham of course) can attend. There will be guest speakers from NALC to explain the role of that organisation and refer to current issues. I will also be attending the NALC AGM, to be held on Zoom on 25th October 2022.

Cllr John Scragg

23rd September 2022