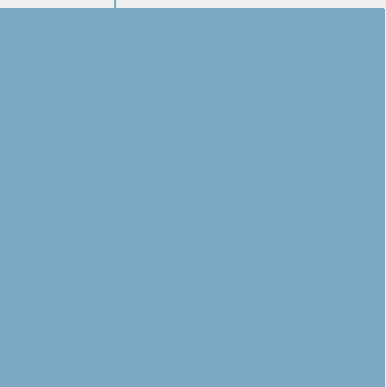
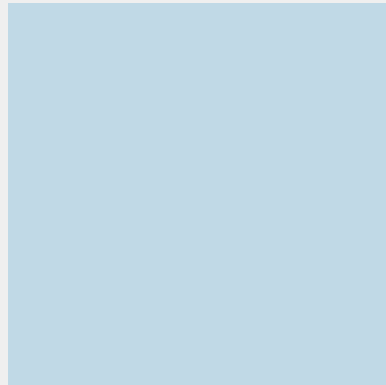


Annual Report 2025/26

Supporting Devon's town and
parish councils to govern
confidently and serve their
communities



Contents

Chair's introduction	1
Chief executive officer's report	2
Governance	5
Our year in numbers	6
Helping you shape the future of parish and town councils	8
Treasurer's report	10
Annual accounts	11

Chair's introduction

Liz Brookes-Hocking



I'm pleased to present our most recent Annual Report, which shows DALC as being in good form and ready to face whatever the future throws at us.

Our CEO's report explains how the staff team has been built up and what they've been doing, while the chair of finance details our financial position. NALC's report covers the national picture, including conversations with and lobbying of central government, the changing context in which our sector operates, the NALC resources available to all member councils, and the challenges ahead.

Local government reorganisation dominated a lot of our thinking and activity in 25/26. We kept members updated with any information we had about proposals from principal authorities and publicised consultations and events being organised by them. We organised a series of online webinars and training to inform councils about issues they might face in the future and gave a full briefing on LGR at last year's conference. After submission in November 2025, the long wait for certainty began, giving us time to consolidate staff roles and focus on communications with members and improving core services.

Three important things emerged for us during the year:

- Whatever the decision made by government, DALC would work positively with the new councils and aim to develop good relations in the interests of our members
- Whatever the decision map looked like, DALC would remain a countywide organisation, supporting and lobbying for all our members and enabling councils to meet and work together, across any division
- We're not going anywhere (except up): parish and town councils will remain in spite of any turbulence above; DALC will remain so long as local councils want us to work on their behalf.

As readers will know, DALC has a strong belief in the current effectiveness of our sector and its potential in the future. With that in mind, read on for achievements so far.

Chief executive officer's report

Rebecca Walker



Firstly, I would like to take a moment to thank DALC's staff team who all work tirelessly to support and guide our member councils. A massive thank you to Elise, Karen, and Sarah; you are all much appreciated and highly valued. There would be no DALC without you!

This last year has seen a few staff changes. I was delighted to take on the new role of chief executive officer, appointed at the DALC Conference on 1 October 2025. I've been with DALC since 2019, and love my new role, particularly working with the parishes and towns in Devon which all do such amazing work in their communities. This year also saw the departure of Cara Stobart (county officer) and Rachel Townsend (temporary administrative assistant) - we wish them well in their new endeavours.

Following a staffing review last summer, we identified that many members were not familiar with the full range of services available through their DALC membership and decided to create a new role of communications officer. We were delighted to appoint Sarah Gillies to that role in early 2026, and she is already making a huge difference. DALC's three main strands of support for our members have always been advice, training and information.

Although we remain a small team (2.65 FTE), we now have dedicated officers for each of these strands, while continuing to promote the sector, advocate for our member councils and work with partners both locally and nationally.

Our main method of communication is our weekly e-bulletin, as well as a termly training e-bulletin, and extra bulletins where necessary. This is our primary method to keep our members up to date, and we encourage members to take a few minutes each week to stay abreast of legal changes, new resources, local updates, and more. We do also have an [active LinkedIn page](#) – please do give us a follow and engage with us there! Our communications officer, Sarah, is continuing to develop our communications to ensure members can get the most from their membership, while also promoting DALC and the local council sector. Our new 'behind the scenes' feature in our e-bulletin helps keep you up-to-date on the wide range of work DALC staff and directors are doing.

Our advice service continues to be very busy, providing on-demand expert advice to our member councils. Karen, our experienced and knowledgeable member services officer, is our first port of call for member queries, with specialist advice also available through partners including the NALC legal team, Parkinson Partnership, Worknest, Tozers LLP, and Breakthrough Communications. The DALC team handled more than 1,200 queries last year, as well as providing support through the Knowledge Bank on our website. Following feedback from members, we are now open five days a week to handle your queries.

Our training offer continues to grow, overseen by our excellent training officer Elise, who will be a familiar face to all! We added seven new courses in 2025/26, including Preventing Sexual Harassment, Writing Grant Applications and Sourcing Funding, Biodiversity, Introduction to TUPE, Managing Projects, Developing Action Plans and Strategies, and Introduction to Neighbourhood Planning, all based on member suggestions. We have more new content coming for you in 2026/27 such as Managing Community Events, a suite of AI courses, and more. Feedback for our training and trainers remains consistently excellent, with attendees describing our trainers as extremely knowledgeable and very engaging. Our core training sits alongside finance training provided by the Parkinson Partnership, and training from Breakthrough Communications on communications and information law.

Alongside our training offer, we have also held several free Connect Events aimed at keeping our members updated on key topics. This year, topics have included Highways and the Planning System, Understanding Roadworks, All Things Traffic, Local Council Insurance and Risk, and Demystifying Assertion 10. We also held several Connect Events focused on LGR, covering topics including localism and devolution, what councils can do now, experiences from Falmouth and Bridgwater, and the changing role of town and parish councils. Connect Events are recorded whenever possible and made available on our website for members. We have more planned for the year ahead to help you stay up to date on topics such as charity law, digitization of the AGAR, libraries, and spatial development strategies. We're very grateful to all our partners who have given up their time to present these events to our members.



We've also aimed to meet directly with our member councils to give you an opportunity to tell us about what matters to you, including several LGR members meetings over the year. We always welcome hearing from members and are delighted when you write to us to share your thoughts on emerging issues or to tell us about the wonderful projects you've been working on. We continue to recommend that councils consider clustering with other parish or town councils in their area to strengthen their voice. If you are having a cluster meeting and would appreciate a DALC representative then please do let us know!

As CEO, I continue to meet with our national network, including NALC, and county association colleagues, to discuss opportunities for shared work and how we can improve the sector. In particular, we work very closely with fellow county associations based in the south west to identify opportunities for joint working and improve our membership offering.

We also engage with partners locally. We regularly meet with various teams from Devon County Council (DCC), including highways, environmental health, and communities. And we are delighted that DCC continues to support our work with an annual grant. In 2025-26, we also enjoyed working with Teignbridge District Council on the creation of a town and parish charter, where council voices fed directly into the finished charter. We also meet with partners from other principal authorities and organisations, to keep up-to-date with what is happening

locally and feed into ongoing work across the county.

While the 2026/27 year will bring further change for our county and the local government landscape in Devon, I look forward to the challenges and opportunities presented. We are keen to continue engaging with local partners and authorities to ensure the best possible outcome for Devon's communities, led so ably by our town and parish councils.

Last, but definitely not least, I would like to extend my heartfelt thanks to all our town and parish councils, and parish meetings, for the invaluable role you play in supporting and strengthening our county. Your local knowledge and dedication is at the heart of community life, with the work you do truly makes a difference. Thank you for everything you do.

“ I would like to extend my heartfelt thanks to all our town and parish councils, and parish meetings, for the invaluable role you play in supporting and strengthening our county. ”

Governance

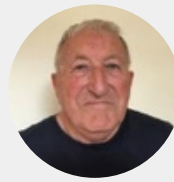
DALC is a membership organisation, governed by its parish and town council members. Members elect the Board of Directors from among the membership and have a direct say in how the DALC is run through the Annual General Meeting.

Our directors



Liz Brookes-Hocking

- Chair of the board
- HR committee



Mike Joyce

- Vice-chair of the board
- Finance committee



Ruth Pearson-Bunt

- Chair of the HR committee



Ian Cowling

- Treasurer
- Chair of the finance committee
- NALC representative
- Represents DALC on the North Devon HATOC committee



Paul Hayward

- Finance committee



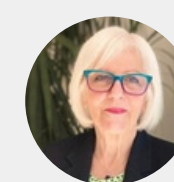
Colin Trudgeon

- HR committee



Colin Slade

- Finance committee
- HR Committee
- Represents DALC with the Devon Climate Emergency
- Represents DALC with the Mid Devon HATOC committee



Pauline Odulinski

- HR committee vice-chair
- Finance committee
- Represents DALC on the Torridge Place Board
- Represents DALC on the Northern Devon Railway Future Alliance

Our year in numbers



351 member
councils



10 Connect
Events



17 in-house
training courses



536 core training
bookings



98 e-learning
enrolments

525 e-bulletin
subscribers



1,176 registered
website users



1,204 member
queries answered



47 core training
courses delivered



173 annual
conference (2025)
attendees





Six guests to the Royal
Garden parties



Helping you shape the future of parish and town councils

Jonathan Owen, NALC chief executive

Across England, parish and town councils are operating in increasingly challenging and complex circumstances. Financial pressures, rising resident expectations, ongoing government policy changes, local government reorganisation in some areas and the continuing impact of devolution are reshaping the landscape — fast.

There is a well-known saying, often described as a Chinese proverb: “may you live in interesting times” — and these certainly are.

Yet despite these pressures, parish and town councils remain the bedrock of community life, central to strong local government and vital to supporting and representing their communities. In this context, NALC has worked to ensure their voices are clearly heard while providing leadership, guidance and support.

Over the past year, we have continued to speak up for parish and town councils and the people behind them. By working closely with ministers, parliamentarians and partners, we have helped secure positive changes on Martyn’s Law, improvements to audit arrangements and stronger recognition of councils within devolution plans at neighbourhood level.

At the same time, we have kept up the pressure where it matters — including continuing to press government to introduce sanctions for poor behaviour, helping ensure councils are places of respect and professionalism, and pressing for the sector to be able to use hybrid and remote meetings.

Alongside this advocacy, we have provided practical, day-to-day support in conjunction with county associations through guidance, advice and training, helping councils navigate an increasingly demanding and complex environment with confidence.

Our year in numbers reflects strong growth, engagement and sector reach. Membership rose to nearly 90% of eligible councils. Digital engagement expanded significantly, with nearly 19,700 contacts and over 500,000 user interactions recorded. Events attracted more than 2,700 attendees, while over 61,000 resource views and downloads highlighted demand for practical support. Social media reach exceeded 130,000 people, and legal and advisory services managed thousands of enquiries. Accreditation programmes, website development and online learning participation further demonstrate the scale of activity and the continued trust councils place in NALC’s services and leadership.

For the year ahead, NALC's priorities centre on stronger voices, stronger governance and stronger partnerships. By fostering collaboration, maintaining high standards and amplifying the sector's influence, we will ensure parish and town councils remain effective, trusted and central to thriving communities.

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As we look ahead, there are three simple but important ways every council can play its part.

- If you have not already done so, register for NALC's website to access the latest guidance, tools and support.
- Demonstrate your council's commitment to strong governance by engaging with peer review through the Local Council Award Scheme.
- And crucially, encourage more people from all backgrounds to get involved in local democracy, whether by volunteering, engaging with council activity or standing for election.

Finally, I extend my sincere thanks to county associations, parish and town councils, clerks and council staff for their continued support and dedication. Your professionalism, commitment and hard work make a lasting difference to communities every day and remain at the heart of everything the sector achieves.



Treasurer's report

Ian Cowling



In the 25/26 year our overall income remained stable at around £200,000. There was much reduced grant income, previously boosted by special projects, but this was balanced by increased training and events, and subscriptions increases of approximately £8,000 each. The increase in training and events income (43%) is particularly welcome as this one of the few areas we can generate additional funds to support our services. The improvement in bank Interest received is due to closer management of our cash balances. The AGM and conference returned a small surplus but this event is always subject to increasing cost pressures.

Total expenditure increased by £25,000. The main increase was £17,000 for staff costs that included one-off staff change costs which fell in this period. Other increases included training costs that reflected our increased activity; governance costs which returned to levels of two years ago; and, subscriptions which included various additional memberships and fees taken out for HR and accounting advice.

Our net Income shows a deficit of £3,000 with the value of our CCLA Property Fund stable.

We have embarked on a website upgrade project which will be funded from reserves.

Considerable effort went into support to members facing the local government reorganisation proposed for Devon. By the time this report is published we should know the outcome for the future unitary structures in our area. We anticipate significant support will be needed for our members during the transition period until the new authorities are fully operational.

Again, thanks are due from me to our staff and Merlin Accountancy Services who carry out the work to keep our accounting records in order.

Annual accounts

Income and expenditure for the year ending 31 March 2026

Income	31/03/26	31/03/25
Advertising	705	790
AGM and conference	10,680	9,760
Bank interest	1,138	189
Grants	9,000	26,412
Investment income	2,549	2,523
Member /other services	8	210
Subscriptions	148,849	140,775
Training and events	27,862	19,465
Total	200,791	200,124

“ There was much reduced grant income, previously boosted by special projects, but this was balanced by increased training and events, and subscriptions increases of approximately £8,000 each. ”



Expenditure	31/03/26	31/03/25
Staff costs	119,325	103,058
Other staff costs	2,290	1,511
Premises expenses	4,913	5,522
Office costs	7,638	6,714
Governance costs	6,258	4,878
Subscriptions	46,603	42,874
Conference and AGM	9,596	9,259
Training and events	6,173	4,241
Grants	250	110
Depreciation	899	640
Total	203,945	178,807
Net income/(expenditure)	(3,154)	21,317
Gain/(loss) on investment	(2)	576
Net surplus/(deficit) for the year	(3,156)	21,893

“
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Annual accounts

Balance sheet for year ending 31 March 2026

Fixed assets	31/03/26	31/03/25
Tangible assets	3,573	2,557
Investments	30,475	30,477
Current assets		
Debtors	10,421	12,534
Cash at bank and in-hand	96,814	99,429
Current liabilities		
Creditors	11,038	11,596
Net current assets	96,197	100,367
Total assets less current liabilities	130,245	133,401
Reserves		
Balance at 1 April	133,401	111,508
Surplus/deficit	(3,156)	21,893
Balance at 31 March	130,245	133,401



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