

Leicestershire and Rutland Association of Local Councils

Strategic Plan 2017-2020

March 2017

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Introduction

Welcome to the second LRALC Strategic Plan. This plan aims to build on the success of the first plan by reinvesting some of the surplus generated in the last few years and being more ambitious by pursuing a growth agenda.

The contents have been directly led by the input of member councils, councillors, clerks, and the LRALC Executive Committee members.

Stages in its development include:

- The 2016 Member Satisfaction Survey
- LRALC Executive Committee Strategic Planning Day summer 2016.
- LRALC Executive Committee Strategic Planning meeting November 2016.
- Initial consultation with member councils December 2016.
- Chairman and Vice-Chairman agree final draft for presentation to Executive January 2017.
- Consideration and initial approval by the LRALC Executive in January 2017.
- Full Consultation with member councils January 2017.
- Final approval and adoption by the LRALC Executive in March 2017.

The plan has been heavily informed by the 2016 LRALC Membership Survey, the results of which have helped identify the priorities and actions contained within this document. The survey response rate was roughly 38% (of member councils submitting a response) providing a sound opinion base upon which to identify our future direction and priorities. The plan also draws upon training feedback, requests/feedback from member councils, and other evidence and data.

The role played by County Associations (CALCs) is continuing to grow in importance with the continuing evolution of the localism agenda and the devolution of services and new powers to local councils. In addition, the government has already made a number of major changes to other systems that impact on local councils in this country (e.g. planning) and this is set to continue with further changes on the horizon.

We strongly believe that LRALC has a key role to play in raising standards within the sector. We have built a strong reputation for supporting local councils in being compliant with the requirements placed on them, and the delivery of national, county, and local objectives (either directly or through supporting member councils) which are of importance to local councils. Local Councils must be in a position where they are fit for purpose, resilient, and sustainable, and this plan aims to help our member councils achieve this. We believe that non-membership of LRALC puts councils at risk and disadvantage in these respects.

The importance of effective CALCs was recognised in Government research carried out into the features and characteristics of successful CALCs¹ to identify what makes a successful County Association and develop models of and recommendations about good practice. The characteristics identified were:

1. Funding
2. Staff
3. Services
4. Leadership
5. Partnerships

This plan broadly uses the above key characteristics to provide “themes” within which to set LRALC’s priorities and actions. For the full report see here: <http://www.leicestershireandrutlandalc.gov.uk/uploads/calc-report-june-07.pdf>

There are 38 County Associations of Local Councils (CALCs) in England, all of which are independent and autonomous organisations supporting their member councils, and LRALC is no different, though wishes to work towards being an exemplar of excellent and innovative practice in the sector locally and nationally.

All LRALC member councils are automatically members of the National Association of Local Councils (NALC), with whom LRALC fosters a close and effective relationship. LRALC also nominates one of its Executive Committee members to sit on NALC National Council to help set NALC policy. However, LRALC is an autonomous separately constituted body and as such sets its own policy and direction of travel, which in turn should be reflected in how the LRALC representative on NALC National Council votes.

The LRALC constitution (last updated in November 2015) details the democratic and decision making structures for LRALC. A full review of the democratic structures and organisational status is included in this plan.

This Strategic Plan takes into account the objectives in the NALC Strategic Plan, though does not necessarily reflect them as a result of the Association’s autonomy.

LRALC has used some of its reserves to supplement income sources in order to sustain growth during the first part of this plan’s lifespan so as to achieve its objectives. Existing staffing resources are already utilised to near full capacity. The Association is in a healthy financial position with prudent reserves, however we recognise that this strategy should only be adopted for a short period of time (e.g. 1-2 years) as LRALC should maintain a level of reserves which is prudent

¹ The Features and Characteristics of Successful County Associations of Local Councils – Commission for Rural Communities July 2007

and which provides cover for contingencies. Included in the plan is the creation of a Medium Term Financial Plan which will outline a clear strategy in this area.

Membership and other income

Despite membership levels being relatively high (c. 93% of councils in membership) there is still benefit in allocating resources towards encouraging the decreasing number of non-member councils to join. LRALC membership fees have not increased substantially in recent years (1% in 2013-14) and in some years not at all.

LRALC membership figures for 2013/14, 2014/15 and 2015/16 are detailed below:

Period of membership	Membership total at end of previous year	Members lost during the year	Members gained during the year	Membership total at the end of the year	LRALC Membership subscriptions received
2013/14	174	0	4	178	£40,122.34
2014/15	178	0	4	182	£41,938.53
2015/16	182	0	3	185	£42,718.87

Unfortunately increases in the NALC element of membership fees is outside of our direct control (other than through our vote at National Council) and this does pose a risk to LRALC in terms of perceptions of overall “value for money” by members as currently a single payment is made by member councils to LRALC which includes the NALC element. NALC is currently consulting on a new affiliation fees model following a review, and this plan contains plans for a similar review of LRALC’s fees model.

Decision making

The Executive Committee is the primary decision making body of LRALC, and between quarterly Executive Committee meetings operational decisions are taken by the Chief Officer, in consultation with the Chairman/Vice-Chairman where appropriate. There is also a separate committee dealing with investments and other delegated financial matters.

This strategic plan is intended to give the Chief Officer flexibility in managing LRALC and its services, and allow strategic decisions to be made in areas identified within the action plan. All actions clearly identify the areas where

Executive Committee decision making has been delegated (and to whom) and areas where it remains with the Executive Committee.

Executive Committee meets 4 times per year at present. However, as the Association grows it may be necessary to revisit the frequency of these meetings, or look at the creation of more committees and/or working groups (see the action plan in this document).

All potential future Executive Committee decisions outlined in this plan will be supported by reports with cost and risk implications highlighted as appropriate to ensure that they are fully informed.

Monitoring and review

As with any plan, the contents of this document are meaningless unless the actions and targets within it are monitored and reviewed.

The monitoring and review process adopted alongside this strategic plan will be simple and will take the form of quarterly, annual, and end of plan reports to Executive Committee. This will take the following form:

- Quarterly monitoring will be by exception, i.e. where there is lack of scheduled progress/activity against actions within the plan, with any proposed remedial actions.
- Annual monitoring will be in the form of a summary report to Executive against each action within the plan, and any recommended changes, on the anniversary of the plan's adoption.
- End of plan monitoring will take the form of a final report to Executive against the priorities and actions in the plan, which will form the basis for the next strategic plan

Jake Atkinson

Chief Officer

January 2017

LRALC Strategic Plan – Themes, Priorities and Actions

Vision: An active, inclusive, and empowered local council tier across Leicestershire and Rutland, working with their communities and partners to improve quality of life in their localities.

Mission: To champion and provide support and guidance to member local councils, their staff, and their councillors, for the benefit of those who live and work in their parishes.

Values: Support, Educate, Advocate, and Innovate.

Objectives (from LRALC constitution) NB: these are subject to review during YR1 of this plan:

The aims and objectives of the Association are to take all necessary and reasonable steps in the interests of its member councils. These include, but are not restricted to:

- providing advice, training and development to member councils to assist them in the proper performance of their functions and duties
- protecting and promoting the rights and interests of member councils
- representing the common interests of member councils at local, county, regional and national level
- encouraging and supporting the parishing of non-parished areas in the Association's area

Strategic Theme – Services

Priorities:

- High quality support offer to members (engagement, development and communication);
- Embedding business continuity and resilience into service development and delivery;
 - High quality training for Cllrs, Officers, and Volunteers in local councils;
 - Member demand led development of services

What	How	When	Resources	Executive
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				Decision?	
Adopt a Business Continuity Plan for LRALC.	Bring forward a draft Business Continuity Plan and associated Action Plan to be used in the event of a major incident affecting the availability and access to the LRALC office, services, and functions.	March 2018.	Officer time.	Yes.	
Consider the creation of a Councillor Mentoring service to offer support to individual Councillors.	Bring costed and risk assessed proposals for a formal LRALC provided member to member mentoring service to Executive Committee for consideration.	September 2017.	Officer time.	Yes.	
Consider the creation of an Internal Audit service to offer provider internal auditors to member councils.	Bring costed and risk assessed proposals for a formal LRALC provided Internal Audit service to Executive Committee for consideration.	June 2017.	Officer time.	Yes.	
Consider the commissioning of an independent Legal Advice service to offer an additional level of legal support to member councils.	Bring costed and risk assessed proposals for a formal LRALC provided independent Legal Advice service to Executive Committee for consideration.	December 2017.	Officer time.	Yes.	

Consider the creation of a Recruitment and Selection support service to offer support to member councils when appointing clerks.	Bring costed and risk assessed proposals for a formal LRALC provided recruitment and selection support service to Executive Committee for consideration.	December 2018.	Officer time.	Yes.
Ensure core training is accessible to all member councils.	Review all core training course costs, including CiLCA and in-house training.	December 2017.	Officer time.	Yes
	Run Councillor and Chairman's training at a range of locations annually to ensure no member council must send delegates further than 15 miles to attend these training courses.	From 1 st April 2017.	Officer time, travel, venue hire (above usual training costs).	No.
Continue to provide rapid access to information and services through the LRALC website and other new technology to provide support 24 X 7.	Aim to upload the following information and resources within 2 working days of them becoming available (unless required otherwise by the LRALC constitution): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Important news items. • LRALC Newsletters. • LRALC Executive Committee agendas 	Ongoing.	Officer time.	No.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> and minutes. • LRALC Branch Committee agendas and minutes. • Executive Committee membership details. • Training course information. 				
	Provide login details to the LRALC website to all member councils annually, and to all delegates at core training.	Ongoing.	Officer time.	No.	
	Encourage, through a range of channels, member councils and local council councillors to follow the LRALC Twitter feed to receive news updates as soon as they are available.	Ongoing.	Officer time.	No.	
	Continue to work with NALC to seek to allow direct web access to NALC Legal Topic Notes and other NALC member only resources through the LRALC member only portal.	Ongoing.	Officer time.	No.	
Expand the range of high quality 'core'	Develop additional core training courses for	Ongoing.	Officer time.	No.	

training courses offered in order to raise standards within the sector.	councillors and officers as appropriate referring to course feedback and member satisfaction survey data.				
Expand LRALC specialist training offer to allow and encourage member councils to meet the majority of their training/continual professional development (CPD) needs for their councillors and staff through LRALC provided training.	Continue to respond to demand and direct requests for continuing and new training courses where commercially viable and in line with the LRALC Mission and Vision.	Ongoing.	Officer time.	No.	
	Raise awareness of the Continuing Professional Development (CPD) points offered through attendance at LRALC training courses as part of the CPD Point Scheme provided through the National Training Strategy.	Ongoing.	Officer time.	No.	
Encourage clerks at member councils, as the most senior member of staff in the council, and other officers to show a commitment to their and the council's continuous development and improvement, and	Promote, through a range of channels, best practice in supporting officer development and the benefits of CPD to member councils, including setting annual training budgets, appraising staff, and creating time for CPD to	Ongoing.	Officer time.	No.	

encourage member councils to support this.	take place.				
Strategic Theme – Funding & Finance Priorities: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • High % of Parish Councils in membership; • Membership fees that are equitable, sustainable and meet the strategic needs of the Association; <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Successful applications/negotiations for external and grant funding; • Continue to increase non-membership fee income as a proportion of overall income (move towards self-sufficiency); <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Providing value for money. 					
What?	How?	When?	Resources	Executive Decision?	
Continue to deliver returns on invested LRALC reserves in a sustainable and risk managed way.	Adopt an LRALC Medium Term Financial Plan containing a reserves policy.	December 2017	Officer and Investment Trustee Committee time.	Yes, following recommendation of draft plan from Investment Trustee Committee.	
Retaining and aiming to increase local council membership (based on 2016/17 membership figure of 185) to 100% by 2020.	Regular contact with non-members, including speaking at their meetings as required.	Ongoing.	Officer and Executive Committee Member time, and administration and travel costs.	No (delegated to Chief Officer).	

	Ongoing support offers (e.g. N'hood Plan support) which are open to non-members through project funded work.		Officer time, administration and travel costs (covered by project funding).	In line with LRALC Financial Regulations requirements.
	Introductory membership offers for non-members.	Annually from March 2017.	Discounted year 1 fee.	No (delegated to Chief Officer).
Ensuring membership fees are equitable and sustainable and, together with other sources of income, meet the strategic growth needs of the Association, including staffing requirements	Evaluation of LRALC membership fee structures and costs, including consideration of other models of how fees could be calculated, through an Affiliation Fee Review.	Establish working party of 5 at March 2017 Executive Committee, recommendations to Executive Committee December 2017.	Officer and Executive Committee member time.	Yes.
Ensure LRALC is providing members with value for money.	Continue to repeat Member Satisfaction survey and consider action where appropriate.	Biennial from June 2018.	Officer time.	Report on the findings of each survey to be presented to Executive Committee for consideration.

	Delivery and monitoring against 2017-20 Strategic Plan and its targets.	Quarterly monitoring by exception, annual progress reported in full on anniversary of adoption.	Officer time and other resources required for delivery identified throughout this plan.	Executive to monitor delivery quarterly and annually.
Consider other fee paying service/support offers not reliant on LRALC membership.	Develop proportion of non-membership fee income through expansion of training, trading, consultancy, pay to use services, and grant/project funding opportunities.	Ongoing.	Officer time.	Delegated authority to Chief Officer within limits sent in Financial Regulations.
	Seek, explore, and apply for funding from principal authorities, strategic partnerships, government, and other funding bodies where it compliments LRALC priorities and is on a full cost recovery basis.	Ongoing	Officer time.	Delegated authority to Chief Officer within limits sent in Financial Regulations.
Continue to grow training income surplus as a proportion of	Review of core training fees.	June 2017.	Officer time.	Yes.

overall surplus.	Set discretionary minimum return of 33% on externally facilitated training courses.	From 1 st April 2017.	Officer time (if cancelling courses).	No.	
Review and revise accounting and budgeting systems to ensure they are fit for purpose and meet the strategic growth needs of the Association.	Joint review alongside review of management reporting systems.	September 2017.	Officer time, professional fees, and purchase of accounting software package.	Yes	
<p>Strategic Theme – Human Resources/Management</p> <p>Priorities :</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Experienced and professional officers equipped to do their job; • Support for ongoing professional development and training for our staff; • Use of competent and experienced trainers and associates to increase delivery capacity; • Appropriately resourced officer team to deliver services and priorities; 					
What?	How?	When?	Resources	Executive Decision?	
Appraise, support and develop LRALC staff to encourage ongoing professional development intended to assist delivery of LRALC's strategic aims.	Support the personal development of individual staff members as appropriate where intended outcomes are in line with their role and the strategic aims of the Association.	Ongoing, through annual appraisal process and individual requests.	Staff training budget, officer time.	Delegated authority to Chief Officer within limits sent in Financial Regulations.	

	Develop and implement appraisal system for LRALC staff.	June 2017.	Officer time, and Executive Committee member time.	Yes.
	Develop and implement LRALC Staff Handbook, to include key HR policies and processes.	March 2018	Officer time.	Yes.
Increase LRALC's human resources capacity (through employment and alternative contractual arrangements) to deliver the Association's services and strategic priorities in a flexible and sustainable manner.	Consider the LRALC commissioned independent review (and its recommendations) of the Association's organisational staffing structures, roles, and salaries.	January – March 2017.	Commissioned report and staffing budget.	Yes.
	Increase the use of individuals with existing sector relevant skills and knowledge to be engaged to deliver specific LRALC services, training, and projects in order to free up officer time.	Ongoing.	Officer time.	Delegated authority to Chief Officer within limits sent in Financial Regulations and agreed budgets/project funding.
Ensure staff are provided with the	Review of Association IT and communication	June 2018.	Officer time, IT budget.	Yes.

equipment necessary to do their jobs and to use new technologies to best meet the needs of members.	hardware needs and renewal/purchase of equipment as appropriate.				
Review and revise management reporting systems to ensure they are fit for purpose and meet the strategic growth needs of the Association.	Joint review alongside review of accounting and budgeting systems.	September 2017	Officer time.	Yes.	
<p>Strategic Theme – Leadership and Governance</p> <p>Priorities:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Positioning of LRALC as an exemplar CALC nationally; • Reviewing our governance and democratic structures; • A diverse, skilled, and effective Executive Committee/Board; • Strong promotion, advocacy, and campaigning on behalf of local councils; 					
What	How	When	Resources	Executive Decision?	
Undertake a root and branches review of the governance and democratic structures of LRALC, including researching and considering alternative legal structures.	Taking appropriate officer, legal, and professional advice, and in consultation with the membership and stakeholders, Executive Committee to undertake a comprehensive review and consider and adopt any	Commence formal consideration at January 2017 Executive Committee meeting.	Legal and professional fees, officer and member time,	Yes.	

	recommendations as appropriate.				
Promote unique nature of LRALC/County Associations and NALC and provide clarity of purpose to member councils and those involved in their operation.	Develop a range of materials and information for circulation by a variety of channels to local councils, including at least one hard copy mailing direct to the clerk and chairman each year.	Ongoing, first hard copy mailing March 2017.	Officer time, postage.	No.	
Continue to support and promote innovation within the sector by playing a lead role in developing new models of service delivery and devolution of services.	Engage with member councils and a variety of local and national partners and stakeholders in order to develop and promote innovative models of best practice.	Ongoing.	Officer time, travel, training budget.	No.	
Engage with NALC to ensure that LRALC can help shape the policy and services of the national body for the benefit of member councils.	LRALC (and its officers and elected members) to engage with NALC (including its officers and elected members) through attendance at events and conferences, responses to consultations, representation on committees and other meetings, and other channels as appropriate.	Ongoing.	Officer and elected member time, travel, training budget.	No, other than when appointing nominees to National Council, etc.	

Seek to attract a diverse range of individuals with appropriate skills and experience to be considered for appointment to the LRALC Executive/Board.	Develop promotional and job profile materials aimed at encouraging potential LRALC Executive/Board members.	Concurrently with the review of LRALC organisational structures.	Officer and elected member time.	No.
	Consider the implementation of an interview process for candidates wishing to be considered for vacancies and elections.	Concurrently with the review of LRALC organisational structures.	Officer and elected member time.	No.
Encouraging and recognising excellence amongst member councils.	Promote and offer free member council support towards accreditation under the national Local Council Award Scheme (LCAS).	Ongoing.	Officer time and travel (covered by LCC contract funding).	No.
	Implement a "Council of the Year" award to be chosen annually by an LRALC appointed panel.	Annually (at reinstated AGM or similar event).	Officer and panel time.	No.

Strategic Theme – Partnerships

Priorities:

- **Strong and positive engagement with key partners and stakeholders on behalf of member councils;**
 - **Delivery of joint projects with appropriate partners;**
- **Development and fostering of strong networks and partnerships between parish councils and other bodies**

What	How	When	Resources	Executive Decision?
Consider opportunities presented by possible partnership working with the Local Governance Research Unit at De Montfort University (DMU) on areas of mutual interest.	Consider the development of a pilot series of “Councillor Masterclasses” for selected Councillors from member councils to be delivered in partnership with DMU.	Summer 2017	Officer time.	No.
	Investigate the benefits of offering placements to relevant DMU students on LRALC projects and activities.	December 2017.	Officer time.	Yes.
Continue to be an active member of FEMALC and other CALC groupings, including County Officer Forums and NALC events.	Where possible ensure appropriate representation at and input into key regional and national CALC meetings, working groups, and other opportunities for CALC/Chief Officer representation.	Ongoing	Travel and officer time.	Delegated authority to Chief Officer.
Encourage and support LRALC Executive Committee members in standing for NALC National Council and other NALC elected positions.	Raise awareness of opportunities amongst Executive Committee members and consider candidates for NALC positions through nomination by Executive	Annually at NALC AGM (local consideration at LRALC Executive	NALC cover travel costs.	Nomination by Executive Committee.

	Committee meetings.				
Engage with strategic partnerships across the LRALC area to ensure that the role and benefits of parish councils are promoted and maximised.	Consider and seek/continue representation on key strategic partnerships, including (but not restricted to) the Leicestershire Rural Partnership (LRP), Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs), and East Midlands Councils (EMC).	Consider annually at first Executive Committee of the year.	Travel and officer time.	Appointment by Executive Committee.	
Further develop partnership working/service delivery with CALCs and NALC where the project/activity is in line with LRALC's priorities.	Chief Officer to identify opportunities for participation in partnership working and collaboration locally, regionally, and nationally with other CALCs and NALC.	Ongoing.	Officer time with project budgets for each individual project.	Delegated authority to Chief Officer within limits sent in Financial Regulations.	