



ADVICE NOTE:	Number 1
SUBJECT:	The Yorkshire Local Councils Associations' (YLCA) Advisory Service and Benefits of Membership.
UPDATED:	December 2022

This advice note explains who we are, what we do, how we are governed, the services we provide and how our members can access those.

Background – who we are and what we do

Yorkshire Local Councils Associations are a membership organisation for local (parish and town) councils and parish meetings (in parishes where there is no parish council), in North, South and West Yorkshire. We are one of 41 county associations of local councils in England. A county association is where local councils and parish meetings can obtain legal and procedural advice and guidance. Membership also affiliates the council to the National Association of Local Councils. Membership is via annual paid subscription.

How are we governed?

The Branches (see below), elect members to the Joint Executive Board which sets the policy and directs general governance of the Associations. Every member of the Joint Executive Board is from a subscribing local council or parish meeting thus we are proud to be able to say that we are member led and governed. Joint Executive representatives are elected from each of the twelve Branches at Branch annual meetings which are held in June each year. The Associations have a joint constitution, which brings together the three separate county associations in the three constituent areas and joins them to form the Yorkshire Local Councils Associations.

Accessing advice from YLCA (our desktop advisory service)

YLCA only gives advice to parish and town councils and parish meetings that are in membership and have paid an annual subscription. The membership year runs from 1 April to 31 March.

Who do I contact if the council or meeting needs advice?

The Clerk and Chair are given log in details for the casework enquiry system that is on our website. That is how formal advice requests are lodged with us and we then use this method to respond to the member council or meeting with advice. Note that we do not give detailed telephone advice and that a Clerk or Chair will be directed to submit an enquiry via the website.

Who do we advise?

Advice is for the council or meeting as a whole and is given via the Clerk to the council. If YLCA officers feel that it is necessary to do so, we are also instructed by the Joint Executive Board to send a copy of advice to the council Chair. Where an enquiry is about or concerns the employment of the Clerk, we will advise the council via the Chair. We can also give advice to a councillor where there is a resolution by the council that this can happen, for example a Chair of a staffing or personnel committee. Where either the Clerk or Chair is not available and advice is needed, the council may nominate a councillor to liaise with us. We must stress however that we do not give advice to individual councillors without the authority of the council.

For enquiries that need to be dealt with by a legal professional, YLCA will refer the enquiry to the legal department of the National Association of Local Councils. This legal service is included in the membership subscription fee. We also retain the services of a HR professional for complex employment related enquiries.

Who should I speak to?

If advice is needed this will be dealt with by one of our officers - Sheena Spence (Chief Officer), Karen Canadine or Karen Mann who are our Local Councils Advisory and Training Officers. If telephoning, you are likely to speak initially to Joy Morgan, our Administration Officer or Ruth Batterley (YLCA and Local Councils Support Officer), who will direct you to an officer that can assist you, but please be aware that if your enquiry is for formal advice for the Council, you will be asked to submit a website ticket.

Information for councillors

The Joint Executive Board has directed that we can give 'information' to councillors. In this context, information means to signpost a councillor to where to find something in a textbook or assist them to expand their skills and knowledge, without compromising the council that they are a member of. It is distinctly different from the formal advice that we give through the channels mentioned above.

Support for councils with difficulties

Where a council is experiencing challenging situations, we can provide a whole council training session for all councillors and the clerk. This is to help everyone involved have the same understanding and knowledge. We also provide a healthcheck service which looks at council policies and procedures and for councils that have a wide range of issues, we can provide a detailed governance review.

National Association of Local Councils

The council's/meeting's membership of YLCA also affiliates it to the National Association of Local Councils (NALC). NALC provides a legal service to its members which means that subscribing councils and meetings have access to a solicitor as part of their membership fee. Generally, YLCA will answer 95% of casework itself but the more complex legal enquiries are sent to NALC. All enquiries must be sent to YLCA in the first instance and the officers then decide whether it merits the attention of the NALC solicitor. NALC also lobby government on wide and varying issues that affect the parish sector. The Branch system (see below) gives opportunity to council/meetings to influence government decisions via NALC. NALC is also providing training to member councils, which complements the offers being made by county associations across the country.

Our training provision for councillors and clerks

We deliver a wide range of training topics, mostly via remote means but returning now to face to face training. Some sessions are produced and delivered by YLCA directly and others, which are specialist are delivered by external presenters. Topics in this category include a basic planning course to help councillors to understand how the planning system works, planning enforcement, neighbourhood planning, cemetery and burial topics and using social media (not an exhaustive list). We also partner with The Parkinson Partnership to deliver training in financial administration in a local council, and with Nimble, who provide a wide range of pre-recorded training, which is available for councillors and clerks to access at their own convenience. Our training programme is produced quarterly and is sent to all members and is available on the YLCA website.

Qualifications for Clerks

The office of Clerk to the council is a professional post. It is strongly recommended that a council will support its clerk (financially and otherwise), in moving up the qualification ladder. Our recommendation is that a new clerk joins the YLCA initial induction sessions and some of the specified topic sessions that we provide. They then move onto the Introduction to Local Council Administration (ILCA), but if they have done sufficient YLCA training, they may instead move onto the ILCA to CiLCA bridging course. CiLCA is the Certificate in Local Council Administration and is then the next qualification on the ladder. If wished a Clerk can then carry on to degree and masters levels with the De Montfort University. YLCA is the lead partner of the Yorkshire and Humber Regional Training Partnership, which delivers Cilca training in the Yorkshire and Humber region.

YLCA website

The site has a wealth of information but can only be accessed with a password and username which is allocated by YLCA. The website also provides information from the National Association of Local Councils, ie Legal Topic Notes that are only available to subscribing members. Advice and Briefing notes are prepared on specific topics and issues by both YLCA and NALC. Councils are encouraged to pass the website log-in details to all councillors so that everyone can be well informed. Our comprehensive training programme is also well advertised on the website, together with model documents and a wealth of guidance in a range of topics.

Branches and expectations of Clerks

The Branches of YLCA are committees of the Joint Executive Board. Broadly, they are meetings (three per year per Branch) where representatives of councils/meetings come together to discuss issues of mutual interest. There are twelve Branches organised by area, and again, the website contains a page for each Branch with minutes and agendas for councillors and Clerks to access. There is also an annual calendar of Branch meetings. Branches often invite speakers to their meetings, for example a principal authority highways officer, planning officers and police. Every subscribing member can appoint two voting representatives to the Branch.

It is an expectation that each member council elects two representatives to YLCA at its annual meeting in May each year and we encourage Clerks to include an item on the agenda of this meeting to enable the council to do so (even if a couple of councillors share the task). In a parish meeting, we would expect the Chair and/or Clerk to be the Branch representative.

Additional information that we will send you

The council/parish meeting will automatically receive a copy of our fortnightly newsletter White Rose Bulletin. This will be supplied via the Clerk and should be circulated to the councillors. We will also send you e-mail updates on any issue that we think will be of interest to the council. We also produce a monthly Law and Governance bulletin which carries information/advice on legal aspects of administering a parish local authority.

Councillor and Clerk Discussion Forums

This was a new initiative started in 2020 during the first Covid lockdown, to bring people together remotely to share their experiences of that situation and it has been hugely successful. The discussion forums continue to take place (separate forums for councillors and Clerks) and are held fortnightly. These sessions are advertised in the White Rose newsletter and Training Programme – they are free of charge and are a great networking opportunity between councils.

Salary Evaluations

We can undertake salary evaluations for councils whose employees are engaged under National Joint Council terms and conditions.

Internal audit service

We provide an internal audit service for councils or parish meetings with a turnover below £25,000 per annum.

Contact with members and general enquiries (non-advisory)

YLCA also has a twitter account to give members quick updates on current news items. See @YorkshireLCA

General enquiries can be sent to the e-mail address below.

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