

Annual Report

LRALC

Year ending 31st March 2024



Supporting Local Councils in Leicestershire and Rutland

Leicestershire and Rutland Association of Local Councils (LRALC Limited)

Annual Report 2023-24

Welcome to the sixth annual report of Leicestershire and Rutland Association of Local Councils (LRALC Limited) following incorporation on 23rd April 2018 when our limited Company was born.

LRALC is a limited company. Our work includes representing, training and advising the parish and town councils of Leicestershire and Rutland, who form the grass roots tier of local government in England. Put simply, we **are** our members.

We offer members a resource of vital, operational information and facilitate communication at all levels of the parish network - district, county, regional and national.

2023-24 was another busy year for the Association

Board of Directors

As member councils will know, LRALC Ltd no longer includes branches in its democratic structures and governing document (its Articles of Association) and instead reintroduced the AGM in 2019 where representatives from each council appointed Directors and voted on other decisions.

The LRALC Board of Directors carried out a full review of the Articles of Association during 2023 to alleviate certain limitations, drawbacks, and unnecessary bureaucracy that had been identified, which did not aid the effective and efficient running of the company on your behalf. Following a period of consultation, members overwhelmingly voted to adopt a new set Articles of Association on 30th October 2023. It is under these rules, set by our members, that we now operate.

The Articles of Association state that the Board when complete shall consist of nine elected directors and 3 selected directors. Any person may be elected by the members as an elected director through an election process to be set by the directors and which may utilise proxy or postal voting. Any person whom the directors regard as appropriately skilled may be appointed by the directors as a selected director and the board shall have due regard to the need for representation from the administrative areas of Leicestershire and Rutland when making such appointments.

John Springthorpe, a long serving director of the LRALC who has held both Chair and Vice Chair positions at various points, decided to resign as a director in November 2023 and we greatly appreciate his valued contributions over the many, many years he was involved with the Association. Similarly, Mary Sherwin and Kiran Chaggar also resigned as directors in late 2023 and we thank them for their input during their tenure. New blood arrived in the form of Glyn McAllister who was voted in as a director at the 2023 AGM in November last year.

The full list of Directors as at **31st March 2024** is detailed below, with additional committee memberships listed in brackets. All Directors are unpaid and the time they give to LRALC on top of their councillor roles is very much appreciated and benefits member councils greatly.

Name	Category of position held
Andrew Brown (Investment Trustee)	Elected Director
Pat Crane	Elected Director
Tony Hirons (Chair) (Investment Trustee)	Elected Director
Geoff Hulland (Vice Chair) (Investment Trustee)	Elected Director
Guy Jackson (Investment Trustee)	Elected Director
Glyn McAllister	Elected Director
Ron Simpson (Investment Trustee)	Elected Director
Marcus Wareham	Elected Director
Vacant	Elected Director
Vacant	Selected Director
Vacant	Selected Director
Vacant	Selected Director

2023-24 Finances

The accounting statements report a deficit for the year 2023-2024 of £9,742, which should be compared with the previous deficit of £32,891 from 2022-2023. Although this was a significant improvement on the end of year position in 2023, the directors recognised that the current funding model was not sustainable and LRALC announced in its [October 2023 Newsletter](#) its intention to undertake a reset of the fee structure. The new fees structure was approved at the December 2023 board meeting, to come into effect on 1st April 2024.

The contract with Leicestershire County Council continued during 2023-24 with £20,000 being received during the year from the County Council for specific agreed outcomes which LRALC met or exceeded (quarterly monitoring meetings are in place to ensure that the Association is delivering against the contracted outcomes).

In November 2022 LCC informed us that LRALC was retaining its full funding for a further 3 years commencing 1st April 2023. We are hugely appreciative of this as it provides us with a further medium term period of certainty which allows us to develop the sector in Leicestershire in a sustainable manner but, moreover, LRALC feel proud that, in the worst financial environment LCC has encountered in at least a generation, they have placed sufficient importance on the role we play for them that we have managed to retain our full contract value.

In addition, Blaby District Council commissioned a further year of Parish Liaison Support during 2023/24, with a similar commission being received from both Rutland County Council, and Harborough District Council.

The continuation and expansion of the comprehensive range of training courses offered by the Association continues to be one of our three largest revenue streams, as well as meeting the learning and development needs of councillors and council staff. Demand from councils for specialist courses continues to grow as the sector experiences continuing change and expanding powers. The expansion of our staffing resource in recent years has allowed us to dramatically expand our training programme, and in-house training has become especially popular as it provides member councils with bespoke training within their own parishes at a time and date of their choosing.

The Internal Audit Service (IAS) is another income generating activity which has seen year on year increase as the service continues to grow with over 50% of our member councils now subscribing to the service.

Investment of Reserves

LRALC originally invested £60,000 of its reserves in March 2014 (£50,000) and December 2015 (£10,000) but have withdrawn £20,000 of it to invest in the growth of the Association. As such, LRALC currently has £40,000 invested, with an unrealised gain of £3,631 at the end of the 2023-2024 financial year.

The directors have recognised the need to adopt a reserves policy, and this should be in place by the end of the 2024-2025 financial year. The fees reset should allow LRALC to build its reserves to an appropriate level again, after having drawn on them to support our operations in recent years.

The Association is happy with the level of return on this investment but continues to monitor the investment through an Investment Trustee Committee to ensure the money in it is managed appropriately and prudently.

Current membership

LRALC retained its 100% membership across the two counties it covers during the course of 2023-24, with all 197 Parish and Town Councils in membership. We did, however, receive the required 1 years notice that a member council wished to disaffiliate with effect from 1st April 2024. This is the first time a council has left membership for many years (over 13).

Whilst we are assured that the council concerned did not leave due to any dissatisfaction with the services offered by LRALC, we recognise that the loss of a member from a collective membership body weakens the overall strength of that body and are hopeful that we will return to full membership in the near future.

Although we are proud of our still high membership rate, we know that it is entirely down to the confidence that our member councils have in us to represent them and meet their needs as members. We will continue to represent the parish tier of local government in Leicestershire & Rutland and develop the Association and its services even further and ensure that we continue to meet the high expectations you have for us.

Requests for professional support and advice remain the “bread and butter” of the Association’s activities and are increasing in complexity, scope, and urgency. Factor in that this element of our work does not generate any income, indeed it has a sizeable cost, but is an essential part of our work where we must be able to respond to demand from our members whatever the circumstances, and the complex nature of balancing the demands of the different elements of our work becomes clear.

Over the course of the year LRALC officers have responded to just over 1250 individual logged enquiries from member councils, with many more daily requests for documents and briefings been dealt with in addition to this.

Some of the queries were simple questions and others, as always, were more complicated and required more detailed and comprehensive assistance. The ongoing supplementary legal, HR and finance support offered by Roger Taylor of Wellers Hedleys, Chris Moses of Personnel and Advice Solutions and Steve Parkinson of The Parkinson Partnership remain a valuable source of support and advice for LRALC member councils and is an area where we invest in securing their services for your benefit as an inclusive part of your membership fee.

LRALC is not just an advice and training body, we also represent our members and campaign on their behalf.

LRALC 2023 AGM

A big thank you from LRALC to all those councils who sent a delegate to our AGM on the afternoon of Wednesday 15th November 2023.

As well as dealing with the business required under our articles and the law, we also invested time and money in making the 2023 event another attractive proposition to both voting members (i.e. the one Cllr each member council nominates to represent their council by voting at the AGM) and also non-voting delegates (officers or Cllrs who wish to attend the event as an “observer”). There were presentations from LRALC on current and future services and support available through the Association; this included an update on the financial crisis and the impact on councils and a review of 2023 elections.

Switch Events Management Software, the main sponsors of the AGM, also gave a presentation outlining the benefits of their product and the National Association of Local Councils (NALC) CEO, Johnathan Owen, attended to share information on NALC campaigns and projects. There was also a marketplace of local and national commercial stall holders who promoted and discussed their services and products whilst delegates grazed the buffet table. A great event all round!

It was reassuring to see so many delegates taking the time to be part of the decision-making structures of LRALC. Overall, the event was attended by 34 voting representatives from parishes with a good number of other representatives attending in a non-voting capacity.

As detailed in the LRALC’s Articles of Association at every annual general meeting one third of the elected places for directors must be vacated, those directors serving longest since last elected being the ones to stand down. When there are directors of equal length of service since last elected those directors to stand down will be drawn by lot.

At every annual general meeting any directors who have been appointed by the directors since the last annual general meeting must retire from office and may offer themselves for election as an elected director or appointment as a selected director.

The following directors, due to retire on 15th November 2023, were re-appointed at the AGM.

- Guy Jackson
- Ron Simpson

As mentioned previously in this report, Mary Sherwin, who was due to retire along with the aforementioned directors, did not stand for re-election and so ended her tenure as a LRALC director.

Glyn McAllister put himself forward for election to the Board and was successfully elected as a director by the AGM.

NALC

During 2023-2024 Cllr Tony Hirons represented our membership at a national level as the Association’s National Assembly member at NALC.

Federation of East Midlands Associations of Local Councils (FEMALC)

FEMALC is a constituted grouping of County Associations (CALCs) comprising Derbyshire, Nottinghamshire, Lincolnshire, Leicestershire and Rutland and Northamptonshire and was created in 1999. Together these Associations represent some 1,054 town and parish councils throughout the region with an electorate of some 1.3 million.

The LRALC representative on FEMALC is Cllr Tony Hirons.

Membership of this group continues to prove invaluable, especially in terms of liaison between CALC officers on operational and other matters.

Training

The Association continued to offer a mix of virtual training offer and face to face training during the year.

Core training (delivered by LRALC officers) for elected members and clerks remained a key priority with all planned training courses being well attended. During the year, 18 councillor sessions were run with approximately 220 members receiving training. These included Councillor's and Chair's courses.

Requests for whole council in-house training surpassed expectations with 23 sessions being delivered during the course of the year; these were either Councillor training sessions or Code of Conduct training.

Alongside this training for elected members, LRALC officers also delivered 5 core training sessions primarily aimed at Clerks which comprised a combined total of around 40 bookings taken for Clerks 1, 2 and 3 training. Core training courses will continue to be developed and delivered by the Association in line with demand and capacity.

In addition, John Kilcoyne, our Deputy CEO, introduced workshops/briefings relating to Annual Parish Meeting, Agendas & Minutes and Confidential Session which many Clerks have attended and found extremely worthwhile.

Training materials including course content and handouts were reviewed and updated during the year to refresh the content and ensure the courses remain current.

As you will know the training programme includes a variety of courses and briefing sessions facilitated by external specialists and those courses were attended by around 290 delegates over the duration of the year. Delegate satisfaction remains high, and the majority of the courses proved very popular, many selling out.

We continue to work hard to develop and expand the range of specialist training offered by LRALC and, although the cost of providing some courses can be considerable with the Association carrying an element of financial risk, we always work to provide these courses to you, our members, at prices lower than the commercial market rates.

Carbon Net Zero

LRALC was commissioned to carry out a pilot project by Blaby District Council. LRALC chose to have staff members Carbon Literacy trained to improve our own skills and increase the support we can provide to councils.

The project involved working with four councils to assess their baseline emissions ('carbon footprint') to identify meaningful targets and milestones. The ultimate aim would be to become carbon neutral by 2030. Those parishes would then establish a framework for reducing their carbon emissions. They would commit to ensuring that all major decisions (i.e. relating to projects, services, facilities, etc) taken by the parish consider and minimize any related carbon emissions.

Parishes were asked to commit to achieving Carbon Literate Organisation (CLO) status. A CLO is an organisation that has been accredited by The Carbon Literacy Project as having a substantial commitment to Carbon Literacy.

LRALC continues to support parishes who are part of the trial with training, advice, and resources intended to maximise the ability of the parish to influence the community they serve to engage with the carbon agenda, and with the ultimate goal of the community becoming carbon neutral.

LRALC Internal Audit Service

Our Internal Audit Service continues to grow with a total of 109 member councils having now appointed LRALC IAS as their internal auditor, which equates to over half of all member councils. LRALC now boasts a team of 12 auditors who are contracted by LRALC to provide the service to parish and town councils, ranging from the smallest to the largest.

Internal Audit is a key component to the system of internal control, the purpose of which is to review whether the systems of financial and other controls over a council's activities and operating procedures are effective. We are delighted that several extremely competent and dedicated auditors have joined our scheme and we are confident that LRALC's Internal Audit Service will dramatically improve the quality and consistency of audit provision across the counties of Leicestershire and Rutland.

We are one of only a handful of CALCs that offer an internal audit service nationally and many other county areas elsewhere in the country are looking to learn from the success of our service and the quality of the audit provision we deliver. It sadly continues to be the case that a very small number of external providers of what are claimed to be "internal audit" services in the LRALC area are providing nothing of the sort, most commonly simply acting as accountants only (internal audit being an assessment of proper organisational governance, not simply the end of year financial figures) and are providing false assurances of compliance and good organisational health to their customer councils. We are always happy to welcome these councils to our professional IAS where we can.

Local Council Award Scheme (LCAS)

The current Leicestershire and Rutland councils who hold accreditation under the Local Council Award Scheme are detailed below.

Anstey PC	Quality Gold
Ashby de la Zouch TC	Quality Gold
Blaby PC	Foundation
Leicester Forest East PC	Foundation
Syston TC	Foundation
Waltham on the Wolds & Thorpe Arnold PC	Foundation

The Local Council Award Scheme (LCAS) has been designed to celebrate the successes of the very best local councils and to provide a framework to support all local councils to improve and develop to meet their full potential. The scheme offers councils the opportunity to show that they meet the standards set by the sector, assessed them by their peers, and put in place the conditions for continued improvement.

More information on the scheme can be found here: <https://www.nalc.gov.uk/our-work/local-council-award-scheme>

Many LCAS applications go back to the parish council for further information before they are approved, in some cases several times. LRALC can offer free pre-application advice to your council to avoid this situation; getting everything in place in advance does make life much easier for you. If you're considering an application for LCAS contact the office to find out about the support available.

CiLCA Qualified Clerks

Two further learners achieved the Certificate in Local Council Administration (CiLCA) qualification which brings the total number of passes achieved in Leicestershire and Rutland since its launch to 113 as at 31st March 2024; around half of these are current serving clerks or deputy clerks in the area.

More and more Councils are including the requirement to hold, or be willing to train to achieve, this qualification when recruiting a new clerk.

Elections 2023

LRALC continues to support town and parish councils before and after the scheduled elections every four years.

Results of elections based on the nominations received in April 2023

39	Full uncontested, no vacancies
124	Quorate, able to meet
13	Full election
10	Partial election (selected wards only)
11	Inquorate

Councils which held a full or partial election, or were full or quorate following the election were able to hold an Annual Meeting within 14 days of councillors taking office as required by the Local Government Act 1972.

A second election was called for each of the 11 councils which were inquorate in May 2023. 10 of these councils were quorate following the second election and were able to hold an annual meeting towards the end of June or into July.

The 11th council which was still inquorate following the second election had a place filled by the principal authority and was able to meet in August.

Staffing matters

Your Association currently has a staff resource amounting to 102 hours per week and the Association office opening hours are 8.30am until 2.30pm Monday to Friday, though activity continues outside of these hours and those councils that use the “ticket system” to place queries will know that queries are often dealt with outside of these hours due to the fact an officer does not have to be in the office to receive and deal with them. We would strongly encourage council to use this system as it allows us to respond as quickly as possible, including outside of normal office hours.

Retained specialist advice

Towards the end of 2012-13 LRALC entered into arrangements with two commercial partners, one a firm of solicitors, Wellers Hedley, the other a firm providing specialist HR advice, Personnel Advice and Solutions, to provide an additional layer of support to our members. These arrangements have continued each year since then as they continue to be of benefit to member councils. The agreement with The Parkinson Partnership for the VAT advice service has also been renewed as it continues to be valued.

Approved by LRALC Board of Directors

Dated: 9th September 2024

APPENDIX 1: MEMBER COUNCILS

Ab Kettleby Parish Council
Anstey Parish Council
Appleby Magna Parish Council
Arnesby Parish Council
Asfordby Parish Council
Ashby de la Zouch Town Council
Ashby Magna Parish Council
Ashby Parva Parish Meeting
Ashby Woulds Town Council
Ashwell Parish Council
Bagworth & Thornton Parish Council
Barkby & Barkby Thorpe Parish Council
Barkestone, Plungar & Redmile Parish Council
Barlestone Parish Council
Barleythorpe Parish Council
Barrowden Parish Council
Barrow-Upon-Soar Parish Council
Barwell Parish Council
Belton in Rutland Parish Council
Belton Parish Council
Belvoir Parish Council
Billesdon Parish Council
Birstall Parish Council
Bitteswell with Bittesby Parish Council
Blaby Parish Council
Bottesford Parish Council
Braunston in Rutland Parish Council
Braunstone Town Council
Breedon on the Hill Parish Council
Broughton & Dalby Parish Council
Broughton Astley Parish Council
Bruntingthorpe Parish Council
Buckminster Parish Council
Burbage Parish Council
Burton & Dalby Parish Council
Burton on the Wolds, Cotes & Prestwold Parish Council
Burton Overy Parish Council
Cadeby Parish Council
Caldecott Parish Council
Carlton Parish Council
Castle Donington Parish Council
Charley Parish Council
Clawson Hose & Harby Parish Council
Claybrooke Magna Parish Council
Claybrooke Parva Parish Council
Coleorton Parish Council
Cosby Parish Council
Cossington Parish Council
Cotesbach Parish Council

Cottesmore Parish Council
Countesthorpe Parish Council
Croft Parish Council
Croxton Kerial & Branston Parish Council
Desford Parish Council
Dunton Bassett Parish Council
Earl Shilton Town Council
East Goscote Parish Council
East Langton Parish Council
Eaton Parish Council
Edith Weston Parish Council
Ellistown & Battleflat Parish Council
Elmesthorpe Parish Council
Empingham Parish Council
Enderby Parish Council
Essendine Parish Council
Exton Parish Council
Fleckney Parish Council
Foxton Parish Council
Freeby Parish Council
Frisby on the Wreake Parish Council
Frolesworth Parish Meeting
Gaddesby Parish Council
Garthorpe & Coston Parish Council
Gilmorton Parish Council
Glen Parva Parish Council
Glenfield Parish Council
Great Bowden Parish Council
Great Casterton Parish Council
Great Easton Parish Council
Great Glen Parish Council
Greetham Parish Council
Grimston, Saxelby & Shoby Parish Council
Groby Parish Council
Hallaton Parish Council
Hathern Parish Council
Heather Parish Council
Higham on the Hill Parish Council
Hoby with Rotherby Parish Council
Hoton Parish Council
Houghton on the Hill Parish Council
Hugglescote & Donington le Heath Parish Council
Huncote Parish Council
Hungarton Parish Council
Husbands Bosworth Parish Council
Ibstock Parish Council
Illston on the Hill Parish Council
Kegworth Parish Council
Ketton Parish Council
Keyham Parish Meeting
Kibworth Beauchamp Parish Council

Kibworth Harcourt Parish Council
Kilby Parish Council
Kimcote & Walton Parish Council
Kirby Bellars Parish Council
Kirby Muxloe Parish Council
Knossington & Cold Overton Parish Council
Langham Parish Council
Leicester Forest East Parish Council
Leire Parish Council
Little Casterton Parish Council
Lockington & Hemington Parish Council
Long Whatton & Diseworth Parish Council
Lubbesthorpe Parish Council
Lubenham Parish Council
Lutterworth Town Council
Lyddington Parish Council
Manton Parish Council
Market Bosworth Parish Council
Market Overton Parish Council
Markfield Parish Council
Measham Parish Council
Medbourne Parish Council
Misterton with Walcote Parish Council
Morcott Parish Council
Mountsorrel Parish Council
Nailstone Parish Council
Narborough Parish Council
Newbold Verdon Parish Council
Newtown Linford Parish Council
North Kilworth Parish Council
North Luffenham Parish Council
Oakham Town Council
Oakthorpe, Donisthorpe & Acreford Parish Council
Osbaston Parish Council
Osgathorpe Parish Council
Packington Parish Council
Peatling Magna Parish Meeting
Peckleton Parish Council
Queniborough Parish Council
Quorndon Parish Council
Ratby Parish Council
Ratcliffe on the Wreake Parish Council
Ravenstone with Snibston Parish Council
Rearsby Parish Council
Ridlington Parish Council
Rothley Parish Council
Ryhall Parish Council
Sapcote Parish Council
Scalford Parish Council
Scraptoft Parish Council
Seagrave Parish Council

Seaton Parish Council
Shackerstone Parish Council
Sharnford Parish Council
Shearsby Parish Council
Sheepy Parish Council
Shepshed Town Council
Sileby Parish Council
Smeeton Westerby Parish Council
Snarestone Parish Council
Somerby Parish Council
South Croxton Parish Council
South Kilworth Parish Council
South Luffenham Parish Council
Sproxton Parish Council
Stanton under Bardon Parish Council
Stathern Parish Council
Stoke Golding Parish Council
Stoney Stanton Parish Council
Stoughton Parish Council
Stretton Parish Council
Sutton Cheney Parish Council
Swannington Parish Council
Sweepstone Parish Council
Swinford Parish Council
Swithland Parish Meeting
Syston Town Council
Theddingworth Parish Council
Thorpe Langton Parish Meeting
Thrussington Parish Council
Thurcaston & Cropston Parish Council
Thurlaston Parish Council
Thurmaston Parish Council
Thurnby & Bushby Parish Council
Tilton on the Hill & Halstead Parish Council
Tugby & Keythorpe Parish Council
Tur Langton Parish Council
Twycross Parish Council
Twyford & Thorpe Satchville Parish Council
Ullesthorpe Parish Council
Uppingham Town Council
Waltham on the Wolds & Thorpe Arnold Parish Council
Walton on the Wolds Parish Council
Whetstone Parish Council
Whissendine Parish Council
Whitwick Parish Council
Willoughby Waterleys Parish Council
Wing Parish Council
Wistow & Newton Parish Meeting
Witherley Parish Council
Woodhouse Parish Council
Worthington Parish Council

Wymeswold Parish Council
Wymondham & Edmondthorpe Parish Council

Total: 197 Local Councils and 7 Parish Meetings with full fee paying membership