

Policy & Resources Committee Meeting – 13th July 2022

Agenda Item 7.

BALC Membership

At the Policy & Resources Committee meeting on 1st June 2022 it was agreed that a decision on ETC's membership renewal would be made following receipt of the Town Clerk's update from the Clerks' meeting with BALC on 15th June.

Cllr Roland Cundy, the new chair of BALC, attended a meeting of parish and town clerks. The purpose of his attendance was to provide information about BALC's activities and its future plans and to receive feedback from the clerks on their experiences and impressions of BALC.

Background

In the past, BALC employed a county advisor who acted as the link between member parishes and BALC's services (advice, support etc). The system had worked well but the advisor moved on, the replacement didn't work out and so BALC agreed an SLA with HALC (Hampshire Association of Local Councils) to provide services on its behalf. Cllr Cundy was clear that he had become a member of the BALC executive because he wished to improve the service being delivered and improve relations with member councils. He had tried to effect change as a member but now believed he could do this better from the 'inside'.

Discussion

Cllr Cundy stressed that it was important to get the right people on board so that the organisation can be effective and move forward. He wishes to change the way the executive is appointed, believing that any councillor from a member council, interested in joining the executive, should have that opportunity. It was agreed that some at BALC saw clerks in a negative light because they had complained about various aspects of BALC's service. Cllr Cundy was of the view that clerks tended to be very resourceful and know what assistance and guidance they needed, that BALC hadn't been delivering hence the criticism was justified.

Points made by clerks attending the meeting:

- Since HALC started delivering services on behalf of BALC, BALC had become invisible
- Requests for sight of the SLA had been refused; members therefore didn't know if HALC was delivering the services it should be. As a member organisation it was felt that member councils should have sight of the SLA.
- BALC exec was hostile towards clerks; didn't make sense as clerks are the gateway between BALC and member councillors
- Clerks naturally collaborative; BALC has been the opposite; again, with a member organisation this approach doesn't make sense
- Hard to see what member councils gain from membership of BALC, apart from membership of NALC
- Some parish and towns deem membership of NALC as important; this organisation has gained in recognition from government departments and starting to have more high-level influence. Others felt that membership of BALC was too high a cost for a nebulous benefit
- Several councils have left BALC over the past few months – commented that BALC didn't ask why or follow it up
- Training offered by HALC is a poor offer compared to what BALC used to offer and yet one of BALC's benefits for member councils is free training. Narrow range of topics (councillors who sit for 4 years have no new topics to encourage them to take up training offers); narrow range of time slots (if your other commitments mean you can't get to a meeting by 6.30pm

then you can't take part in any of the training offered); face to face events are in Hampshire and therefore not a serious offer for many BALC members

- Newsletters provide information usually weeks after information has been provided by elsewhere; content has very little that is new
- Understand that smaller parishes may find some of the advice useful but larger parishes/towns have more recourse to advice/assistance from other sources

Cllr Cundy accepted the comments made. Said BALC thought HALC did provide a good service but that 80% of usage from BALC members was from parishes in West Berkshire. Acknowledged there were far more parishes in WB than anywhere else in Berkshire and that these tended to be smaller. Accepted that they needed to work on the offering for large parishes/towns.

His proposals include:

- increase the frequency of executive meetings to 6 weekly rather than quarterly
- a part-time administrative officer will be appointed to assist the BALC executive
- a member survey will be conducted to find out what members think and what they wish to see delivered
- the training provision (free to BALC members) will be reviewed and face to face events will be held at Reading Holiday Inn
- a mission statement will be adopted – 'to serve and inspire'
- the make-up of the BALC executive will also be looked at, a parish or town councillor that is interested in being involved should be able to be co-opted onto the executive
- a new website is being developed, this will have a members area which will contain more information than the previous site

Earley Town Council's membership fee for 2022 is £3,332.51, of which £1,732.51 is the NALC element.

Councillors to discuss the matter and to **RESOLVE** on either:

- A. ETC to not renew its membership and to withdraw from BALC/NALC
- B. ETC to renew its membership for 2022 and monitor BALC's progress under its new leadership.

Jo Friend
Town Clerk