

Dear Colleagues

Happy New Year! I hope you all had a healthy and peaceful break over the Christmas and New Year holiday.

This is the time of the year when local councils are finalising their budgets – and therefore the time when you are probably considering the benefits you get from the money you spend. I thought it might therefore be a good time to remind you of the benefits of IWALC membership.

In my view, there are five main benefits:

1. Full membership of NALC

Membership of IWALC gives you full membership of the National Association of Local Councils (NALC). Such membership is only possible through your local county association, which is IWALC. Membership of NALC entitles you to, among other things:

- Direct access to their legal and other advisory services;
- Full access to their website;
- Regular briefings and news updates; and
- Participation in webinars and other training activities, many of which are free.

I would like to draw your attention to the fact that all IWALC member councils, not just the larger ones, now have direct access to NALC's legal and other advisory services.

2. Free Training

IWALC's training events are free for councillors and staff of member councils. Participants from non-member councils are welcome to attend but have to pay a fee. Between May and December 2021 we provided training in *Basic Councillor Skills*, *Chairmanship*, *Introduction to Planning*, *Introduction to Finance* and *Code of Conduct*. Plans for 2021 include further courses in *Planning* and *Code of Conduct*, and courses in *Equality and Diversity* and *Social Media*.

3. Relations with the Isle of Wight Council and other local organisations

IWALC is a voting member of the Isle of Wight Council (IWC)'s Corporate Scrutiny Committee and Health and Wellbeing Board and a non-voting member of the Planning Committee. We also have regular meetings with IWC representatives and often call upon Cabinet members to attend our 'topic' meetings. This gives member councils the chance to express their views and influence the Council's decisions.

We also send representatives to the meetings of eight other local organisations, including the Voluntary Sector Forum, Local Access Forum and AONB, while many others contribute regularly to our monthly *Bulletin*. Furthermore, we are members of two regional local government organisations: the South East Region County Association Forum (SERCAF) and the Hampshire and Isle of Wight Local Government Association.

4. Sharing experience

IWALC provides a vehicle for local councils to share experiences and learn from each other. This is particularly important at present, when we are facing many challenges, ranging from Covid and climate change to the pressure to take over, or contribute to the funding of, some

of the IWC's functions. We do this in various ways, including the monthly *Bulletin*, meetings on specific topics and special events. In 2021 we held topic meetings on the local government elections, the Draft Island Planning Strategy and Island Roads, and hosted a workshop on the lessons learned from community mobilisation in response to Covid, while in our December *Bulletin* we launched a debate on the Island's housing crisis.

5. A collective voice

Last but not least, IWALC provides a collective voice for the Island's local councils. Through our relations with the IWC and other organisations, our monthly *Bulletin*, and our topic meetings and special events, we publicise the important work that local councils do and ensure that their voice is heard. Twenty-six (79%) of the Island's 33 councils now belong to IWALC. Needless to say, we would like to have 100% membership! We need to work together, particularly in these challenging times.

For further information, please contact myself (conyersdiana@gmail.com), our County Officer, Heather Rowell (heatheriwalc@gmail.com) or our Communications Officer, Jill Webster (jwebster.iwalc@outlook.com).

Thanks and best wishes

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fIWALC Chair