



# Berkshire Association of Local Councils

## Newsletter

MARCH 2026

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### Welcome to the March edition of the BALC Newsletter.

In conjunction with Hampshire ALC and the Hampshire and Isle of Wight Community Resilience Forum, we are delighted to offer a joint Emergency Planning and Community Resilience event, free of charge to our members.

The event will be held on Tuesday 24<sup>th</sup> March at Shaw House, Newbury, and will be a hands on session designed to help Parish and Town Councils build confidence in development their own Community Emergency Plan. Guiding you through the essentials, by introducing simple tools and templates, will show how local knowledge and strong community networks can make a difference during an emergency. It's a great opportunity to ask questions,

share ideas, and leave feeling better prepared—and more connected as a community. As this is a free event, places will be limited to 2 per council, but if the demand is high, allocations may be reduced to 1 attendee per council. For more information and booking information please see the [Latest Events](#) page on the BALC website.

### ***The BALC Executive Committee***

## TRAINING AND EVENTS

**Please read below for important information with reference to Training Courses currently being offered for BALC members**



### **CLERKS AND OFFICER'S UPDATE**

After a very successful rescheduled event in early January, it has been agreed to continue with the officer updates in Berkshire. The feedback was that these sessions are valued, and offering different options may encourage more Clerks to attend. There will be a mix of online and in person sessions, topics to be covered will be provided by you, the Clerks. An email will go out about a month prior to the event for suggestions. Although there will be a minimal charge for this session, it will be a nominal charge of £15, in line with the sessions we offer in

Hampshire. For the face to face sessions, we will need to ensure that there is a minimum of 10 delegates for it to be viable to go ahead.

### **Year End and Officers Update**

The session scheduled for 19<sup>th</sup> March 2026 will focus on Year End with information on the digitalisation of the AGAR. This is a good opportunity to refresh yourself with the Year End process and receive feedback on what the External Auditors found last year, to avoid for this year! There will also be a short presentation on proposed digitalisation of the AGAR, which is being trialled for this year end. To book your place, please click [here](#). Please note that the delegate fee for this session will still be included in your membership fees.

### **Digital and Data Compliance**

As we move towards the Year End, are you confident you are fully compliant with the new Assertion 10 of the AGAR? This training course will cover all aspects of Digital and Data Compliance and helps Councils understand their responsibilities. There are still a few spaces left on this final course before the Year End. Click [here](#) to book.

Please see below for the current courses still available under your membership.

<b>March 2026</b>				
<b>Councillor Development</b>	Year End for Councillors	Wednesday 4 <sup>th</sup> March	10:00 – 12:30	ONLINE
<b>Development for All</b>	Digital & Data Compliance	Thursday 12 <sup>th</sup> March	10:00 – 12:00	ONLINE
<b>Officer Development</b>	Year End and Officers Update (Hampshire)	Tuesday 17 <sup>th</sup> March	10:00 – 13:00	Hockley Golf Club, Winchester
<b>Officer Development</b>	Year End and Officers Update (Berkshire)	Thursday 19 <sup>th</sup> March	10:00 – 12:00	ONLINE

For further information on all training courses offered by our service provider, Hampshire ALC, please following the training link from the BALC website [here](#).

**Please note BALC reserve the right to cancel any course that does not reach the minimum delegate attendance of 8 and to remove the benefit of inclusive training if the budget becomes exhausted prior to the year end.**

**In the meantime, we need to once again remind all Councils that although currently Berkshire ALC members do not pay delegate fees directly for courses, in accordance with the Terms and Conditions here, if places are cancelled within 14 days, or delegates do not attend on the day, the individual Councils will be charged directly for a non-attendance.**

## MEMBER SERVICES INFORMATION

### Changes to the Procurement Thresholds.

Councils must comply with the Procurement Act 2023 where potential contracts have an estimated value (including VAT) of over **£207,720** (previously £214,904) for goods or services, or **£5,193,000** (previously £5,372,609) for public works (construction) Where a contract will run for several years, it is the total (not annual) value that matters. For more information, please see the Resources Financial Updates section in the member area of the Hampshire ALC website.

### Section 137 Limit

The Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government has confirmed the increase in the Section 137 expenditure limit for parish and town councils in England for the 2026/27 financial year. The new limit is £11.60 per elector, up from £11.10 in 2025/26. The increase reflects the percentage rise in the retail price index between September 2024 and September 2025, in accordance with Schedule 12B of the Local Government Act 1972. Section 137 of the Act allows parish and town councils to incur expenditures for purposes that benefit their communities when no specific statutory power is available

### Employment Law Changes – Employment Rights Bill

This significant new piece of legislation will amend a number of pieces of existing legislation, including the Employment Rights Act 1996. The new legislation is being introduced in phases, with some of the high profile changes, such as changes to the timeframes to submit employment tribunal claims, and significant reductions to the length of service required to make a claim for unfair dismissal coming later this year and into 2027. We have outlined below the changes that may impact Local Councils, which are being implemented in April 2026

#### 1. Changes to Statutory Sick Pay

Many councils will have occupational sick pay arrangements that will not be affected by this change. However, if you have any staff on contracts with statutory sick pay this will change as follows:

- Statutory Sick Pay (SSP) will become payable from the first day of illness (this is currently day 4)
- The lower earnings limit is being removed. Currently workers must earn a minimum amount to be eligible for statutory sick pay so this change means more staff will qualify.

*Council Action* - Most payroll systems will reflect these changes but if you pay SSP you should double check when processing these payments for the first time after April 2. Check you council policies for any reference to statutory sick pay and amend / remove the current 3 day waiting period if it is in there.

#### 2. Paternity Leave and Unpaid Parental Leave

Paternity leave will become a day 1 right from April 2026. Currently, an employee must have worked for you for 26 weeks before being able to take paternity leave, although many employers were already more generous than this. Ordinary parental leave will also become a day one right – currently, an employee must have worked for you for 1 year to be eligible. Remember, ordinary parental leave is typically unpaid and is separate from maternity/paternity

and shared parental leave. The restriction on taking paternity leave after shared parental leave will be removed.

*Council Action* – Review any policies you have in these areas and amend them to reflect the new timescales.

### **3. Whistleblowing Protections for Sexual Harassment**

Sexual harassment will become a 'qualifying disclosure' under whistleblowing law. This will mean protection from detriment and unfair dismissal for whistleblowers making a sexual harassment disclosure.

*Council Action* – review any whistleblowing policy you have and ensure Sexual Harassment is included as a qualifying disclosure. Many policies may already have this in there. The Government is also setting up The Fair Work Agency from April, and this body will take over enforcement of employment rights that is currently spread across several agencies. We will keep you updated on the changes that are due to come into force throughout the year, and we will be offering training courses at suitable points too.

### **4. Home Working Tax Change**

Currently employees who do not receive a home working allowance from their employer can currently claim tax relief of £6 per week to offset against their extra household costs, without submitting expenses. This will no longer be available to claim from the 2026/2027 tax year onwards. There is no change to the arrangements for employers paying staff a tax-free home working allowance of up to £26 a month. If your Council currently pays staff a £26 per month homeworking allowance it can continue to do so. Further details can be found on HMRCs website here.

## **Freedom of Information Act 2000 (FOI)**

The Freedom of Information Act places a duty on every public authority to adopt and maintain a publication scheme which details the publication of information by the authority and is approved by the Information Commissioner; adoption of the Information Commissioner's Office model publication scheme meets this requirement. (Practitioners' Guide 2025, 5.125)

Parish, town, and community councils are required under the Freedom of Information Act 2000 to adopt and maintain an approved publication scheme. Councils should adopt the ICO's Model Publication Scheme and make it available to the public.

The ICO also provides guidance with templates that are tailored for parish, town and community councils, which complement, but do not replace, the scheme.

Councils should have both in place.

Councils should also publish a list of charges with the Publication Scheme, indicating when you will charge and how much. The ICO model publication scheme requires any fee to be justified, transparent and kept to a minimum. Generally, you should only charge for communicating the information, such as photocopying and postage. Further guidance, along with the model publication scheme, is available on the ICO website here.

## Updates to CiLCA from February 2026

Following a recent review and consultation, there have been a number of changes to the CiLCA qualification which took effect from the February 2026 intake.

The learning outcomes have been updated, and a new learning outcome on biodiversity has been introduced.

Mentoring training with a CiLCA registered trainer is now mandatory, and is delivered throughout the year across five sessions, with a new short introductory session prior to the start of the programme.

Candidates are strongly advised not to register with SLCC until they have attended at least one mentoring session.

Anyone considering CiLCA will need to attend the annual Introduction to CiLCA course, which is held each February of each year. This session is essential for anyone who is considering undertaking CiLCA as it provides essential information about the qualification itself and most importantly the time required. For more information then please contact [training@hampshirealc.org.uk](mailto:training@hampshirealc.org.uk).

However, we are running an additional online Introduction to CiLCA course on Tuesday 10<sup>th</sup> March, due to a high demand. If you would like to book a place, please contact [training@hampshirealc.org.uk](mailto:training@hampshirealc.org.uk) to book your place. A reminder that all CiLCA courses or courses relating to Clerk's accreditation and qualifications are paid for by the Council, these fees are not included in your membership.

## SHARING YOUR STORY – COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Unfortunately, we haven't had any articles for publication in this edition, however if let us have any articles to promote your Council's achievements by 24<sup>th</sup> April 2026 for publication in the May edition of the Newsletter.

## LOCAL COUNCIL OPPORTUNITIES

There are currently no advertised opportunities in Berkshire however, there are a few available in Hampshire, please see the Hampshire ALC website [here](#) for more information.

Members can advertise an employment or voluntary opportunity on the BALC website included in their membership. Further information can be found on the following [link](#).

