

ADVICE NOTE:	Number 1
SUBJECT:	The Yorkshire Local Councils Associations' (YLCA) Advisory Service and Benefits of Membership.
UPDATED:	April 2025

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 gives advice and guidance to local councils and parish meetings in its area. The Yorkshire Associations are the largest in England. Membership also affiliates the council to the National Association of Local Councils and a subscribing member can engage a solicitor for legal advice via YLCA and as part of its membership fee. 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 eleven 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 (ticket) 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.

Who do we advise in the Council or Parish Meeting?

Advice is for the council or meeting as a whole and is given via the Clerk to the council/parish meeting or to the Chair of a member parish meeting. 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 or to one of our other external advisory providers which cover employment and HR and finance.

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, Karen Mann or Ruth Batterley who are our Local Councils Advisory and Training Officers. If telephoning, you are likely to speak initially to Joy Morgan, our Administration 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.

Partnership with Breakthrough Communications

This organisation gives advice to parish sector councils across the country in matters involving communications, GDPR, Freedom of Information Act 2000 and the Environmental Information Regulations. If a council contacts YLCA with an enquiry of any of these natures, we may send this to Breakthrough for their advice, as these are their areas of expertise and knowledge. Referrals to Breakthrough can only be handled by YLCA and each member council or parish meeting will be able to be referred to Breakthrough for free advice, twice per year.

Templates and model policies for local councils and parish meetings

Our website is the place to go for these and we can supply a wide range of documents, to avoid the council (and the clerk), having to develop these from scratch. Only member councils and meetings can access the members section of the site where this information is kept. www.yorkshirelca.gov.uk

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 health check service which looks at council policies and procedures and for councils that have a wide range of issues, we can also provide a detailed governance review, in situations where councils have had or experiencing major difficulties.

National Association of Local Councils

The council's/parish 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 legal enquiries are sent to NALC. The NALC solicitors produce a set of Legal Topic Notes (89 in the set currently), which address a wide range of aspects of local council administration. These are available to subscribing members on our website. NALC also lobbies government on issues that affect the parish sector. The Branch system (see below) and the Associations' Joint Annual Meeting 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 provide a wide range of training opportunities for councillors and clerks, both remotely and in person. 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, 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) which is administered by the Society of Local Council Clerks. 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,

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its range of Advice Notes, that are only available to subscribing members. Advice and Briefing notes are prepared on specific topics and issued by both YLCA and NALC. 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 of YLCA

The Branches of YLCA are committees of the Joint Executive Board. Broadly, they are meetings where representatives of councils/meetings come together to discuss issues of mutual interest. From Spring 2025 there will be one Branch meeting per year in defined areas. The proposed format is a speaker or training, making appointments to the YLCA Joint Executive Board and considering national and local issues affecting local councils. 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 the 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 weekly 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 or parish meeting. We also produce a monthly Law and Governance bulletin which carries information/advice on legal aspects of administering a parish sector local authority.

If any councillor or chair wishes to receive information direct from us via e-mail, please complete the consent form on the YLCA website (homepage).

Councillor and Clerk Discussion Forums (separate 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 a successful venture. The discussion forums continue to take place and are held monthly. These sessions are advertised in the White Rose Bulletin and Training Programme – they are free of charge and provide a great networking opportunity.

Salary Evaluations

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

Contact with members and general enquiries (non-advisory)

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

Yorkshire Local Councils Associations
Suite 8, Sibling Workspace, Tadcaster, LS24 9JF.
Tel: 01937 228602
E-mail: admin@yorkshirelca.gov.uk