

# Support for Local Councils

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## 1. Introduction

- 1.1 This proposal details how Cheshire East Council intends to support Cheshire Association of Local Councils (ChALC), which provides assistance to Town and Parish Councils (Local Councils) across Cheshire East, from 1<sup>st</sup> April 2016 to 31<sup>st</sup> March 2017.

## 2. Background

- 2.1 ChALC is an infrastructure organisation that acts as an 'umbrella' organisation for a wide membership, and is a first point of contact for partner organisations. They were originally grant funded by Cheshire County Council and then have been in receipt of annual grant funding to support core objectives since the inception of Cheshire East Council in 2009.
- 2.2 Previous grant funding has enabled ChALC to deliver a wide range of actions for the benefit of local councils and the communities they serve. For example :-
  - Develop closer partnership working between local town and parish councils and community and voluntary organisations
  - Work on the Code of Conduct and keep the ChALC database up to date
  - Facilitate the new deal with local councils and support resilient communities through a regular training programme for clerks and councillors
  - Encourage Local Councils to consider the take up the General Power of Competence so they are better placed to take on additional assets and services
  - Support the parishing of unparished areas– in particular the community governance review in Macclesfield
  - Supported newly established councils such as reformed Hulme Walfield and Somerford Booths Parish Council
  - Promote the new Local Council Award Scheme (formerly Quality Council Scheme)
  - Work in partnership with CEC and assist with the Parish Conference in May 2014
  - Develop and deliver a comprehensive training programme to local councils such as planning and the countryside, HR and events and volunteers, social media
- 2.3 The Partnerships and Communities Manager manages the Council's budget for supporting infrastructure organisations, including ChALC.

## 3. Purpose of Grant Funding

- 3.1 Grant funding has supported ChALC to deliver a core provision of services, thereby enabling the first tier of local government to help CEC meet its corporate objectives. Funding has been provided to increase the capability and expertise of Local Councils across Cheshire East, so they can better understand and meet the needs of their local communities as residents within Cheshire East.

3.2 Outcomes have been achieved through the provision of advice and guidance, targeted support, outreach services, training and development and other agreed activities. Benefits to date include:-

- Delivery of specialist training sessions on wide range of subjects
- Closer partnership working developed between local town and parish councils and community and voluntary organisations
- Improved governance, awareness and working to implement the Local Council Charter and Local Council Award Scheme
- Local Councils encouraged to take up the General Power of Competence so they are better placed to take on additional assets and services
- Support for the parishing of unparished areas and newly established councils

3.3 ChALC is able to support and enhance the valuable work of their members in local communities, through positive contact and direct action, networking and provision of valuable social assets. Providing support for ChALC supports the infrastructure arrangements for local councils, enabling Local Councils to develop and and strengthen their role to achieve their aims.

## 4. Funding Criteria

4.1 Funding is only available to support Local Councils to achieve their aims and outcomes. In order to be successful it is expected that ChALC will:-

- **Identify and fill the gaps** – identifying any remaining unparished areas to be ‘parished’
- **Raise standards** – by providing support to newly established councils and access to information, training and quality assurance standards, so that Local Councils have the knowledge, skills and resources they need to provide effective first tier governance for the benefit of their local communities.
- **Promote the NALC Local Council Award Scheme** – which provides a framework to support all local councils to improve and develop to meet their full potential.
- **Review and promote the Code of Conduct** – monitor number of local councils adopting the Code, review and update the current Code and promote
- **Enable communication and collaboration** - encouraging Local Councils to share resources and to work collaboratively, by providing opportunities to network, and enabling them to share good practice and expertise.
- **Provide a voice** – acting as a conduit and represent the diverse views of Local Councils to the Borough Council and other public bodies. Promote and facilitate two-way communication and consultations so that Local Councils can contribute to discussions and decision-making.
- **Promote strategic involvement** – supporting parish councils in making representation to CEC on strategic issues and ensuring that any particular duties and powers are appropriately followed
- **General Power of Competence** - actively support uptake and monitor the number of local councils qualified under GPoC

- **Promote partnership working** – encouraging local councils to engage with voluntary and community groups, and develop joint working practices to address local needs and priorities
- **Support consultation on the Local Councils Charter** during 2016

## 5. Funding Process

- 5.1 The budget is managed by the Partnerships and Communities Manager in the budget year 2016/17. Changes to funding have been decided by the Partnerships and Communities Manager as the budget holder, in consultation with the Department's Portfolio Holder.
- 5.2 Grant funding for 2016/17 has been agreed at £14, 213. This is at the same level as funding for 2015/16. It should be noted that future funding will not be exempt from cuts.
- 5.3 Equality Impact Assessment Screening is carried out annually on all funding changes and if necessary full Equality Impact Assessments undertaken in line with the Council's policy.
- 5.4 ChALC will be required to sign an annual funding agreement, which will set out expected outputs and outcomes for 2016/17 and provide clear monitoring and reporting arrangements for the financial year.
- 5.5 Funding is paid half yearly, with 50% of the annual allocation being paid from April (as long as ongoing monitoring reports are up to date) and the remainder paid from October. This is upon receipt of satisfactory half yearly reports, or as soon as possible after the receipt of the necessary reports.

## 6. Development in 2016 and support from 2017

- 6.1 Cheshire East Council needs to determine what we require from Local Councils, as democratically elected organisations, in order to meet our corporate objectives. We need to determine what benefit is provided through funding ChALC, and how the organisation is able to support us to obtain best value with regard to the above.
- 6.2 In order to move forward effectively, as a first step it will be important to consult with local councils to find out: -
  - What benefits they have received as the result of previous funding that ChALC has received,
  - What barriers they have encountered or why they have not taken up membership or services
  - What improvements or additional services they would like.
- 6.3 During 2016 it is also proposed to develop and agree a Local Councils Charter that will set out the principles by which the two tiers of local government can work together in partnership to deliver services, influence policy decisions and overall improve the quality of life for those living, working and visiting in the area.

- 6.4 This is a piece of work that will need scoping out and consideration. It is therefore recommended that this funding proposal is agreed for one year. Once a baseline has been established, this will inform any future direction and funding agreement from 2017 onwards
- 6.5 A number of policy reviews will be carried out on some existing strategies in 2016, and work is underway to develop new policies and approaches to funding. This will improve on good work and remove any policy that is no longer relevant or fit for purpose, so that corporate priorities can be met in more effective ways.
- 6.6 Reviews include the Sustainable Community Strategy, and Health and Wellbeing Strategy. In addition, it is proposed to develop and agree a Cheshire East Social Value Strategy that will provide an additional rationale for providing funding to infrastructure organisations, such as ChALC, and the broader VCF Sector.