

Here we go!

BALC, or the Braintree District Association of Local Councils, has been launched successfully and can now start delivering benefits to member parish and town councils.

There was a BALC a few years back, but unfortunately it lapsed and EALC in late 2020 suggested a restart. There was considerable interest in a stronger voice for local councils in dealings with the District and County councils, and some means for moving forward on shared concerns, such as policing and community safety, highways, environmental protection, recreational and leisure facilities. A small group was asked to “re-invent” BALC and has drafted a basic constitution, arranged for the election of a chairman and vice-chairman, an Executive of 9 volunteers, enlisted help from an acting clerk, registered an email address (it is hoped to obtain “balc.gov.uk” for a website), and is completing arrangements for a bank account. A subscription of £40 has been agreed to cover administration, communication and accommodation outgoings.

Where to next?

The whole point is to mobilise that stronger voice, your council's and your community's voice. Over the page is a short questionnaire inviting initial thoughts on what BALC needs to be saying. Please assess these ideas 1-10 (1 as most important to you) and return to balc.clerk@outlook.com. We'll report on these by the end of the month. There's room to add anything left out.

Some things need deeper thought and may be better moved on by a group of those most concerned looking into them with more detailed proposals. Examples might be how to help individual elected councillors be more effective in getting what they want done, or perhaps more effectively responding to planning applications. The questionnaire invites your views on topics or issues to be taken on within a group, and interest in running such a group within BALC.

One hot topic is “County Lines”, or the drug misuse business and exploitation of young or vulnerable residents, using mobile phones. It is happening in Essex, and is the root of much other crime. It's not just urban, either. How can we all play a useful part in driving this down?

Less dramatic is the sharing of what works best. Wheels don't need re-inventing every time, and the answers to most questions already exist – if we only knew where to look. Already EALC routinely share good ideas, but perhaps we could go one better, with a conversation all the time on what we've done successfully and feel others should be aware of.

You could use BALC as a sounding board, as a “megaphone”, to ask for suggestions or advice, to find answers or seek actions where it might not be easy on one's own.

Therefore we encourage all those eligible to join BALC to do so, along with those that have already agreed. BALC will then, as your own association, truly speak for us all with a strong voice and be in a position to get answers and action. Membership forms will be issued in the near future with a request for details of your intended representative.

Diary dates (all at 7pm):

BALC meetings, face-to-face and with remote participation option by Zoom:

- 1st July 2021 at Braintree DC offices
- 7th October 2021 at Steeple Bumpstead
- 27th January 2022 at Witham (to be confirmed)
- 7th April 2022 at Braintree DC.

Your Executive Committee looks forward to hearing from you.

Questionnaire:

Please mark these topics in their importance to your council and community: mark from 1 (low) to 10 (high):

The Local Development Plan, Neighbourhood Plans, planning applications responses	
Highways – traffic, cycling, safety, repair, parking, signage, lighting, paths	
Community safety – policing, drug misuse, access to health services, schools	
Environment – conservation areas, ecology, parks/gardens, floods	
Recreation, leisure, sports, halls/fields/open spaces - provision/maintenance	
Service issues – refuse collection, pollution control, school transport ...	
Council admin – budgets, banking, grants, accounts/audit, legal matters, media ...	
Jobs and business, housing	
Other services – eg cemeteries	
Sharing good ideas that work: a central “knowledge base”?	

Please include below anything else that matters to you that BALC could take up:

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Please mention anything that could be better handled by an interested group of councils:

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Your details:

Council name	
Your name	
Email address	
Phone number	

Please respond to balc.clerk@outlook.com .