



County Update

Affiliation Special 2025

Contents



Chair's Letter, Cllr Mike Eldred	3
CEO Letter, Charlene Slade	5
NALC Membership	7
Star Council Awards	8
Local Council Awards Scheme	11
Partnership Working	12
Member Services	
Training Initiatives	13
Member Enquiries	15
Communications & Information Sharing	17
Grant Funding	18
Employee Assistance Program	19
Contact Us	20



Chair's Letter



Cllr Mike Eldred
EALC Chair

Dear Chairs, Councillors, and Clerks,

As we continue to embark on the journey of devolution and local government reorganisation, membership of your County Association remains key. We will ensure you are well supported and informed of the latest changes. Change on such a significant scale can be daunting and challenging; however, we are best placed to offer you support.

The association has a dedicated webpage, a regular newsletter, and various briefing sessions for Clerks and Councillors, with key partner organisations presenting to keep you up to date.

Over the next twelve months, you will see the development of sector-specific training and networking events taking place in your area. We are determined to transform the way we work, to improve communication, member engagement, visibility, and accessibility by bringing events closer to you.

We believe that all County Associations across the country represent the first tier of local government and are vital for providing member support, life-long learning, community engagement, and representation for local councils on multiple levels.

In Essex, we strive to improve and enhance our services, continually seeking to embrace smarter ways of working. Our success has been recognized nationally as Star County Association winner in 2023 and finalist in 2024.

Additionally, the EALC, in partnership with ECC and NALC, actively supports the vital work undertaken by Essex Town and Parish Councils. Our collective voice on community matters resonates at both county and national levels.

Chair's Letter



Cllr Mike Eldred
EALC Chair

The EALC is committed to promoting our sector and collaborating with organisations dedicated to improving the lives of Essex residents. To this end, the EALC has representation on many forums to make sure your voice is heard:

- Independent Climate Commission
- Essex Health and Wellbeing Board
- Essex Honours Panel
- Rural Crime Forum
- Safer Essex
- Essex Rural Partnership Strategic Board
- NALC Financial Management and National Policy Committee
- Violence Against Women and Girls Steering Group (VAWG)
- Infrastructure Leads Roundtable on Devolution and Local Government Reorganisation
- Community Safety

I wish to record my thanks to all Essex Parish and Town Councils Councillors and Clerks for their continuing support of their communities and also to Cllr Kevin Bentley, the leader of Essex County Council, and the Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner, Roger Hirst, for their continued support and transparent collaborative working with the EALC for the benefit of our residents and their financial commitment which enables the EALC to deliver quality services to our Local Councils.

Thank you for your dedication to improving our communities.

Kindest regards,

Cllr Mike Eldred

EALC Chair



Charlene Slade AATQB CiLCA, Chief Executive Officer

Dear Members,

As I write to you in this Special County Update, I take a moment to pause and reflect on the journey we have traveled and the path that lies ahead. It is in these moments of reflection that we gain clarity, allowing us to celebrate our achievements and thoughtfully consider the challenges still to be overcome.

Anyone working in local government understands that no two days are alike. Every milestone achieved, every change implemented, and every ongoing transformation presents new opportunities and challenges. Our work is never static. It continuously evolves and is shaped by the needs of our communities.

With the recent consultation seeking views on a proposal to form a Mayoral Combined Authority for Greater Essex, with the first election for a Mayor taking place in May 2026, it's easy to get caught up in the urgency of day-to-day operations, but today, I invite us all to pause and appreciate the progress we've made together. With every achievement, we also face new obstacles. We have faced unexpected challenges that measure our resilience and require us to adapt, learn, and grow.

From implementing new policies and programs to navigating complex decisions, we have made great strides in improving our services to support members delivering services that enhance the lives of those who depend on us in communities.

We will continue to keep you informed about the upcoming Local Government Re-organisation and all other issues relevant to Parish and Town Councils, deliver training that meets your needs and support you through our member enquiries service.

We will also assist in the formation of new Parish and Town councils which will be even more vital under the new Unitary system.

Our strength as an association lies not only in our successes but in our resilience when confronted with adversity. We have the ability to turn obstacles into opportunities, to rethink how we work, and to inspire those around us to push the boundaries of what is possible. The very nature of local democracy is changing, and it is through embracing that change, while staying rooted in our values, that we will continue to thrive.

CEO Letter



Charlene Slade AATQB CiLCA,
Chief Executive Officer

In the coming months, we will face significant challenges. But I am confident that we can meet these challenges head-on. The foundation we have built, our knowledge, expertise, and unwavering dedication is strong enough to withstand the challenge.

As we look to the future, I urge each of you to continue being a beacon of innovation, collaboration, and determination. Let us not be daunted by the hurdles that lie ahead but be inspired by the endless possibilities that change can bring. Together, we will continue to shape the future of our county, making it a place where everyone thrives today, tomorrow, and for generations to come.

Thank you for your continued dedication and service.

Warm regards,

Charlene Slade, AATQB CiLCA

Chief Executive Officer

NALC Membership



NALC provide a national voice for local (Parish and Town) councils across England. The EALC raises awareness of their work and provides members with a range of services to support their needs. This includes-

- **Campaigning** – lobby for the issues that are important to local councils and communicate those views to government and a range of influential organisations, in the private, charity and public sector.
- **Legal, accounts and audit advice** – Written, telephone and digital advice from NALC's well-experienced solicitors.
- **Publications** – A quarterly magazine, guides on being a good councillor, employer, finance and transparency, neighbourhood planning and a range of toolkits.
- **Conferences, events and training** – NALC's national events and training sessions are opportunities to bring our diverse membership together to learn about new or topical initiatives and share ideas.
- **Publicity** – Raise the profile of local councils and the sector beyond a regional level
- **Media** – Guidance on how to deal with a media crises, how to deal with reporters and media outlets and writing a media policy.
- **Standards, awards and recognition** – Opportunities all year round for local councils to take up the chance to celebrate and be recognised for achievements through the Local Council Award Scheme, Council Spotlight and Star Council Awards.



Star Council Awards

The NALC Star Council Awards are the pinnacle of nationwide recognition for Parish and Town Councils. These awards celebrate innovation, dedication, and outstanding achievements, showcasing the remarkable projects and services that make our communities thrive. We are proud to announce that EALC was a runner up for County Association of the Year 2024, following last year's 2023 award. Additionally, we are thrilled to recognise Cllr Richard Collins from Great Braxted Parish Council, Essex who has been awarded Councillor of the Year for 2024. This award acknowledges his significant contributions and efforts that have made a meaningful difference in the community. The NALC Star Council Awards include the following categories:

- **Council of the Year**— Honouring councils that exemplify excellence in service delivery, impact, leadership, collaboration, and community engagement.
- **Councillor of the Year** — Acknowledging councillors whose efforts have made a significant difference in their community.
- **Young Councillor of the Year**— Celebrating the contributions of young leaders who bring fresh perspectives and energy to local governance.
- **County Association of the Year** — Showcasing the support county associations provide councils through guidance, training, events, managing projects, and producing publications.
- **Clerk of the Year**— Recognising exceptional clerks whose dedication and expertise have significantly impacted their council.
- **Climate Response of the Year** — Highlighting innovative projects that demonstrate an understanding of climate change and mitigation efforts at the local level.

The Star Council Awards culminate in a parliamentary reception at the House of Lords where the winners will be announced and celebrated. This event is more than an awards night, it celebrates the power of local governance and community spirit. It's an opportunity to network, share success stories, and inspire others.



For more information on how to apply, visit [NALC Star Council Awards Webpage](#).

Star Council Awards– EALC County Association of the Year Finalist

We are proud to have been recognized as a finalist for the County Association of the Year award, a testament to our commitment to delivering efficient and professional services tailored to meet the specific needs of our member councils. At the Essex Association of Local Councils (EALC), we have developed an extensive training program that provides custom, two-hour sessions on key topics such as council procedures, financial management, and roles and responsibilities, ensuring that both new and experienced council members receive the support they need. For those who prefer face-to-face learning, we also offer in-house training options.

In addition, we provide dedicated legal support, ensuring our members receive reliable responses within seven working days, which is essential for effective governance. We have played a vital role in helping parish and town councils, including Saffron Walden Town Council, achieve high standards by attaining Quality Gold status under the Local Council Award Scheme (LCAS).

Our training programs encompass a range of academic courses, such as the Certificate in Local Council Administration (CiLCA), as well as practical courses focused on council services, volunteer management, planning, and compliance with regulations such as data protection. Furthermore, in partnership with Health Assured, we offer an employee assistance program to support clerks' well-being, demonstrating our innovative approach to member support.

We also maintain strong member engagement through regular e-bulletins and platforms for sharing council activities, which helps build a close-knit community network among clerks. Additionally, we facilitate grant administration for local councils on behalf of the county council, providing direct support to streamline grant applications.

Through these varied services and initiatives, we support Essex councils in delivering high-quality local governance and enhance professional development for council staff and members throughout the county. This dedication to excellence is what led to our recognition as a finalist for this prestigious award.

For more information on how to apply, visit [NALC Star Council Awards Webpage](#).

Star Council Awards– Councillor of the Year 2024 –Cllr Richard Collins, Great Braxted Parish Council, Essex

Cllr Richard Collins has revitalised Great Braxted's community by spearheading the ambitious refurbishment of the Pavilion, a cornerstone of local life. Through his relentless dedication, he secured over £130,000 in funding, including major grants such as £69,000 from the Department for Levelling Up, Housing, and Communities (DLUHC) Community Ownership Fund —making Great Braxted the only council in Essex to receive this grant last year. This funding has enabled crucial upgrades, including insulation cladding, new windows, furnishings, and interior decoration, with plans for further enhancements like solar panels and a new roof to boost sustainability.



His commitment to transparency and community engagement is exemplary. Cllr Collins keeps residents informed through regular updates at parish meetings and detailed articles in the Braxted Bulletin, fostering trust and encouraging feedback. This two-way communication has empowered residents, instilling a strong sense of pride and collective ownership.

Cllr Collins has shown remarkable resilience in managing this project, navigating logistical challenges, coordinating with contractors, and overcoming supply chain disruptions to keep the project on track. His forward-thinking vision and hands-on leadership ensure the Pavilion will serve as a sustainable, vibrant hub for generations to come, setting a high standard in local governance.

For more information on how to apply, visit [NALC Star Council Awards Webpage](#).

Local Council Awards Scheme

The Local Council Award Scheme (LCAS) is designed to recognise the achievements of outstanding parish and town councils while providing a structured framework that empowers all councils to reach their full potential. By participating in this scheme, councils can demonstrate compliance with sector standards and undergo evaluations by their peers, creating an environment focused on continuous improvement. For councils already confident in their high-performance standards, the LCAS serves as a verification of their progressive practices against industry benchmarks. Meanwhile, councils looking to enhance their operations can utilize the scheme as a structured roadmap for initiating improvements, ultimately fostering better performance, greater confidence, and a commitment to ongoing development in their pursuit of excellence.



- The Bronze Award is designed for councils to demonstrate compliance with essential standards, serving as a benchmark for performance and continuous improvement.



- The Silver Award reflects a council's excellence in governance, community engagement, and continuous improvement, demonstrating exemplary practices and qualifying for the general power of competence.



- The Gold Award represents the highest standards of excellence in governance, community leadership, and council development. Gold Award councils exemplify forward-thinking leadership, foster community unity, demonstrate outstanding business planning for value, and consistently seek innovative improvements. These councils serve as benchmarks for best practices in our sector, reflecting their commitment to exceptional performance and ongoing advancement.



For more information on how to apply, visit [EALC Local Council Awards Webpage](#).

Partnership Working



Partnerships for the Essex Association of Local Councils (EALC) involve collaborative efforts with various stakeholders, government bodies, community groups, and other organisations to achieve common goals and address shared issues. These partnerships help EALC enhance its services, resources, and expertise, leading to improved support for local councils and communities in Essex. These partnerships enable EALC to leverage collective strengths, build relationships, and enhance collaboration to address challenges, drive innovation, and create opportunities for local councils to thrive and serve their communities effectively.



Training Initiatives

The Essex Association of Local Councils (EALC) provides a diverse range of training opportunities to support Parish and Town Councils in their operational and developmental needs. This includes-

Comprehensive Training Calendar

EALC offers a comprehensive Training Calendar that includes a variety of courses and workshops throughout the year, updated on a regular basis.

Online Nimble Training Programme

Members can access the Online Nimble Training Programme, offering convenient and flexible learning opportunities tailored to their schedules.

Saturday & Evening Online Courses

As well as delivered in-house, Councillor Training is available, in modules, through Saturday and Evening online courses, allowing members to enhance their knowledge and skills in a structured manner.

Specialised Training Programmes:

These include a three-day Chair's Training Programme, two-day Councillor Training Days, New Clerks Course, core courses for essential skills development, finance management courses and refresher courses for both Clerks and Councillors.



Training Initiatives

Councillor Training

Councillor Training Days 1&2 along with Councillor Refresher Courses can be arranged through the Association to be delivered directly to your Council area.

Short Courses

EALC offers Short Courses that are tailored to your Council's requirements, delivered in person, focusing on specific topics relevant to council operations.

Bespoke Courses

Members can enroll in specialised courses tailored to their needs, such as Cemetery Management, Village Halls, Allotments, Routine Playground Inspection, War Memorials, Public Rights of Way & Greens, Commons & Open Spaces and HR Courses.

Certificated Courses

Members can obtain certifications in Fire Safety, Health and Safety, First Aid, Risk Assessment, and Routine Playground Inspection, enhancing their proficiency in key areas.

Certificate in Local Council Administration (CiLCA)

CiLCA represents an accessible introductory certification designed for individuals working within the local sector, including Clerks and Councillors. This qualification is granted by the nationally recognised awarding body, Ascentis, and is positioned at Level 3 of the National Qualifications Framework (NQF), the equivalent to qualifications such as AS/A levels, NVQs Level 3, or BTEC Nationals.

Pursuing CiLCA enhances the understanding of legal principles and best practices within Local Councils. Students engage in a comprehensive evaluation of policies and procedures, ensuring the council's adherence to ethical standards. CiLCA establishes a strong foundation, enabling the council to effectively navigate evolving situations and work towards its future goals and vision. Moreover, a Clerk with CiLCA certification contributes to the council's eligibility to obtain the General Power of Competence.



Member Enquiries

Our expertise covers a wide range of issues faced by our Member Councils. We appreciate the significance of the Council and their role as the first tier of local government, employing their resources to deliver exceptional services to their communities. Our member enquiry specialist, Ann Wood is knowledgeable in the legislative framework that specifically applies to Parish and Town Councils, as well as other laws that underpin council-related transactions. Our team provides additional support to councils for their routine activities and also helps to address any concerns or difficulties that arise. Additionally, we provide resources to council members on crucial issues of interest including regular email updates and e-Bulletins. Response Time The EALC is committed to responding to your requests within seven working days. If you have queries that require assistance from the National Association of Local Councils (NALC), please note that there is a 15-day response time. To ensure timely advice, specify the date by which you need the information. This service does not incur any additional costs.



HR-Related Matters via WorkNest

For HR-related issues, the EALC utilises WorkNest (through NALC). The initial advice is free of charge and this will be enough for many councils. However, if further assistance is needed, additional paid services are available with Worknest.



VAT Related Matters via The Steve Parkinson Partnership

The EALC also works in partnership with The Steve Parkinson Partnership on VAT related matters. The Partnership has many years experience in VAT matters specifically related to Town and Parish Councils. Again, the advice is free of charge but if a council feels that they need further assistance, additional paid services are available.



FOIA, SAR and communications through social media via Breakthrough Communications

The EALC works with Breakthrough Communications to help our members with FOIAs, SARs and general communications through websites and social media. The advice is free of charge.

Member Enquiries

Solicitors' Services through Essex Legal Services

EALC Member Councils can engage solicitors' services through a partnership with Essex County Council, 'Essex Legal Services'. When requesting these services, be sure to ask for an estimate of costs, as this is a non-free service.

NB – For all the above services, which are either free or at a preferential rate, the council must come through the EALC. You should send an explanation of the situation and any relevant documentation to memberenquiries@ealc.gov.uk. If the enquiry relates to anything to do with contracts of employment, you must send a copy of the relevant contract with your request. All documentation is treated in confidence.

Existing Legal Expenses Cover

If your council has existing legal expenses cover through insurance, exercise caution. Consulting EALC/NALC without notifying your insurer could impact your coverage.

Second Legal Opinion

If your council already has solicitors representing it, their consent is necessary before seeking a second legal opinion.



Communications & Information sharing

By facilitating open and transparent communication, the association provides timely support and guidance to its member councils, helping them to stay up-to-date with changes in legislation, policy, and best practice. This enables local councils to make informed decisions, improve their services, and better serve their communities.

Communication Channels

We are dedicated to ensuring open lines of communication through a variety of accessible channels. Members can quickly connect with us via email, phone, or by visiting our office for face-to-face consultations. This focus on direct engagement allows you to receive prompt assistance and addresses any queries effectively.

EALC Website

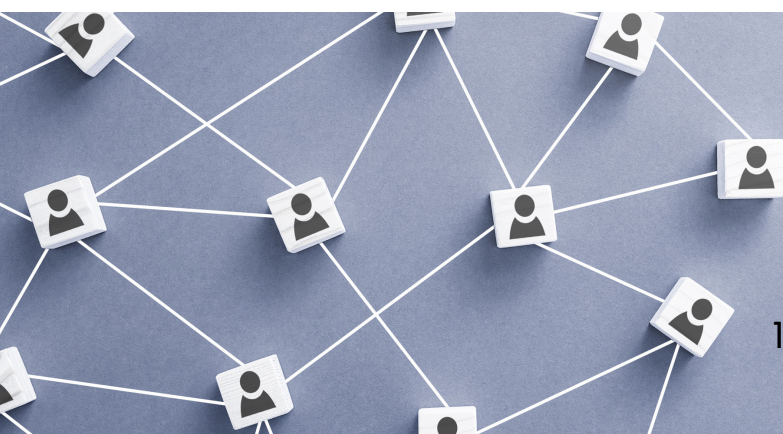
Our revamped website serves as an essential resource centre, granting members easy access to important information and partner links. With a streamlined design, you can effortlessly navigate through the latest updates and resources tailored to your interests.

Weekly E-Bulletins

The Association keeps members up to date with regular e-bulletins that feature key news, collaborations, and available resources. These updates not only inform you about our initiatives but also provide valuable insights into recent legislation and policy shifts, helping you stay informed in the dynamic realm of local governance.

Local Council Forums

The Local Councils Forum provides a space for members to collaborate, share best practices, and exchange knowledge. This initiative fosters community connection and cooperation, creating a rich learning atmosphere that enhances the skills of local councils and promotes innovation and growth within our network.



Grant Funding

The Essex Association of Local Councils (EALC) is proud to administer funding for Parish & Town Councils and Voluntary and Charitable Organisations on behalf of Essex County Council. Over the past year, we have successfully facilitated grant funding initiatives aimed at supporting communities in need, particularly in light of the rising cost of living. Our commitment to enhancing community resilience and fostering connections has been at the forefront of our efforts. Below, we highlight some of the key funding initiatives we have managed, demonstrating our dedication to making a positive impact throughout Essex.

Foodbank Funding

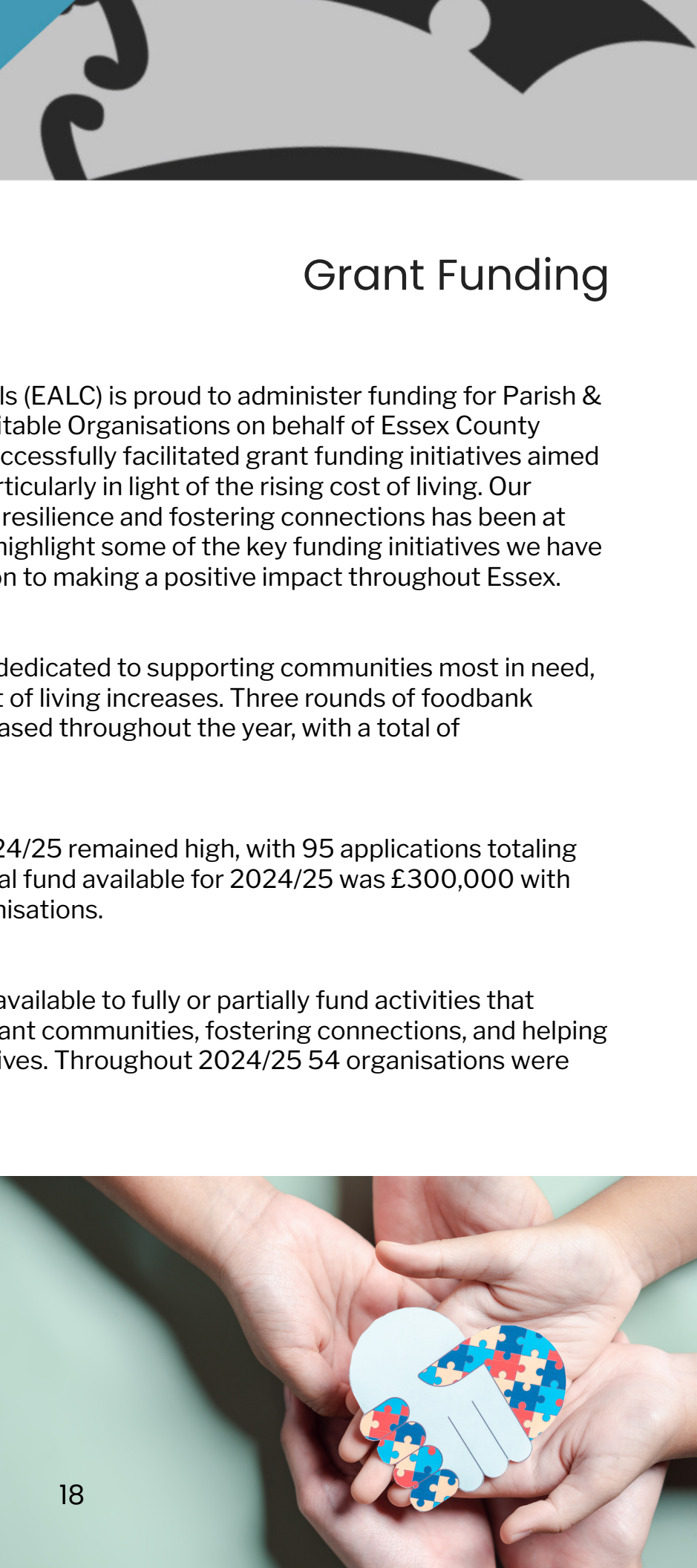
Essex County Council continues to be dedicated to supporting communities most in need, especially those hardest hit by the cost of living increases. Three rounds of foodbank funding totaling £723,230.00 was released throughout the year, with a total of £698,040.00 being awarded.

Community Initiative Fund 2024/25

Applications to the CIF scheme for 2024/25 remained high, with 95 applications totaling £775,980.45 being submitted. The total fund available for 2024/25 was £300,000 with £249,788.00 awarded across 37 organisations.

Microgrants Schemes

Micro-Grants of up to £1000.00 were available to fully or partially fund activities that contribute to building resilient and vibrant communities, fostering connections, and helping people to live happy and independent lives. Throughout 2024/25 54 organisations were awarded a total of £48,173.00.



Employee Assistance Program



At EALC, we are committed to promoting mental health and wellbeing. In addition to our existing initiatives, we proudly offer an Employee Assistance Program (EAP) through Health Assured. As the United Kingdom and Ireland's largest independent and award-winning EAP provider, Health Assured extends specialised support to over 13 million individuals daily.

What is an Employee Assistance Program (EAP)?

An EAP is a confidential employee benefit designed to assist you in dealing with personal and professional challenges that may impact your home life, work life, health, and overall wellbeing. Through this program, you can expect a wide array of support services and resources aimed at promoting the physical and mental health and wellbeing of Clerks within Member Councils. To gain access to the health and wellbeing services provided through the My Wisdom app, follow these steps:

1. Download the App

Search for "Wisdom: Learn, Grow, Thrive" on your device's app store (e.g., Apple App Store or Google Play Store) or visit <https://www.healthassured.org/wisdom-app/> to download.

2. Create an account

Open the app and follow the on-screen prompts to create a new account. You will need an organisation code, which you will find in the Health Assured Welcome Pack received with your most recent affiliation letter.

3. Log in

Once you've created an account, log in using your credentials you have created.

4. Explore features

After logging in, explore the features of the app, which are categorised into four key areas: Wellness, Wellbeing, Engagement, and Reward & Recognition.

Contact Us

Meetings to the Association are by appointment only.

Opening Hours

Monday–Thursday 9am–5pm, Friday 8.30am–4pm

Telephone

01371 879722

General Enquiries

info@ealc.gov.uk

Mailing Address

42B High Street
Great Dunmow
Essex
CM3 1AH

Charlene Slade AATQB CiLCA

Chief Executive Officer

charlene.slade@ealc.gov.uk

Stephanie Robinson ICAEW CiLCA

Financial Controller

stephanie.robinson@ealc.gov.uk

Sophie Wolker BScHons

Communications and Office

Co-ordinator

communications@ealc.gov.uk

Pearl Willcox CiLCA

Executive County Training Officer

pearl.willcox@ealc.gov.uk

Ann C Wood LLB CertHE DMS

Head of Member Enquiries

legal@ealc.gov.uk

Michelle Pavey

Funding Administrator

funding@ealc.gov.uk



www.ealc.gov.uk



EALC Copyright 2025.

