

BEING A SENIOR COUNCIL OFFICER CAN BE A RISKY BUSINESS

Your position carries levels of accountability and exposure – and distinctive risks – not found to the same degree elsewhere in the public service. And you may be targeted over the level of your rewards.

So plenty of things can go wrong or cause concern.

- Difficulties with elected members, officer colleagues, the external auditor, standards issues, the media (including social media), and the public
- Disciplinary or capability procedures (also carrying obvious reputation risks)
- Termination of employment (whether sought by you, the council, or both)
- Complaints (with attendant unwelcome publicity)
- Concerns about pay or conditions of service
- Issues about pensions and taxation (up to hundreds of thousands of pounds)
- Personal financial planning and investment for a secure future
- Retrospective challenge to a severance package
- External reorganisation or merger, and internal restructuring

Distinctive risks need a distinctive solution – ALACE.

You need:

- a framework of distinctive conditions of service
- specialist expertise and experienced personal support
- access to bespoke advice on financial planning and investment, including how lawfully to minimise tax liabilities.

ALACE is the trade union for local government chief executives and senior managers. It appoints the staff side of the JNC for Local Authority Chief Executives, so is involved in pay and conditions of service negotiations. (The conditions of service handbook contains many provisions specific to CEs' distinctive role and position, such as appraisal/ performance management, disciplinary and grievance procedures, and advice to political groups.)

ALACE retains a team of consultants (five former council chief executives and one former pensions director) to help with issues such as these. They are available not only during the day but also in the evening and at weekends. Their involvement can range from a single phone conversation about difficulties with a councillor or senior colleague, through representation in a disciplinary investigation or support in responding to a complaint or grievance, right through to negotiating an exit package when a parting of the ways has become inevitable, and maximising pension entitlements. They can secure advice on individual financial planning and investment, including (lawfully) minimising tax liabilities before, at, and following retirement (such as reducing additional tax charges related to your pension pot that can run into hundreds of thousands of pounds for high earners), and help in many other areas.

Their experience and expertise are ideally suited for dealing with, for example:

- an alleged failure of performance, eg after a serious case review
- a complaint against you, which can become more damaging if it drags on unnecessarily
- a desire by councillors for your departure (sometimes with good cause, sometimes with no good cause).

ALACE consultants will work with you to secure the best outcome possible in the circumstances – negotiating a severance package; responding effectively to a disciplinary investigation, complaint, or grievance; minimising reputational damage; maximising pension entitlements; minimising tax liabilities; obtaining advice on the financial implications of taking a new job in the public sector following redundancy or early retirement; securing financial planning and investment advice; and so on.

ALACE arranges national and regional seminars covering such matters as the implications for high earners of changes to the Local Government Pension Scheme, related changes to the taxation system, and investment opportunities.

In addition, ALACE responds to Government consultations on proposals for new regulations and other legislation affecting local government officers. Recent examples include the recovery of public sector exit payments and their capping, changes to statutory employment protection, pension changes, and the Welsh Government's white paper and Bill designed to reform local government in Wales.

ALACE also makes submissions to inquiries and studies, eg the Parliamentary Committee examining the proposed exit payments cap legislation, the House of Commons CLG Committee Inquiry into Local Government Chief Officers' Remuneration, Lord (John) Hutton's Independent Public Service Pensions Commission, and the (Will) Hutton Review of Fair Pay in the Public Sector.

The members' section of the ALACE website (www.alace.org.uk) contains a range of information on pensions, statutory protection, severance and retirement, and other employment-related matters affecting senior officers.

If you join ALACE you gain easy access not only to valuable online information but also to consultants who are familiar with:

- the operating environment in local government, and what makes councillors tick
- approaches, behaviours, and expectations of senior local government staff
- the latest legislation affecting local government employment
- the operation of the Local Government Pension Scheme, pension taxation issues, and long term financial planning and investment

In a nutshell, you get personal support when you most need it.

ALACE consultants dealt with 128 requests for assistance in 2015/16 – that's 43% of the membership. So there's a good chance you might need ALACE's help at some time. As one former member put it, 'The ALACE subscription is the best – and best value – insurance available'.

For further information, contact Ian Miller, Honorary Secretary, alacehonsec@yahoo.co.uk, 07515 190917, or use the form at www.alace.org.uk