

Clerk's Report: Attendance at SLCC Regional Training Seminar & SLCC Devon & Cornwall Joint Branch Meeting

1. SLCC Regional Training Seminar

Date: 3 June

Key Sessions & Learning

- **Making AGAR Digital – Annie Child, SAAA**
 - New online AGAR portal launching 2027; two-year transition period.
 - Live trial underway with ~100 councils.
 - Portal generates required PDF for publication/signature.
 - Variance explanations submitted directly from the accounting statement where >15%.
- **Cash Access UK – Thea Watts**
 - Banking Hubs provide shared access to cash where no bank/post office exists.
 - 237 hubs currently operating; run by Cash Access UK (not-for-profit, funded by major banks).
 - Hubs can be requested by communities lacking cash access.
- **Raising Local Resilience – Andrew Maliphant**
 - UK food supply chain holds only three days' stock.
 - Government "Prepare" campaign focuses on weather/power outages but not food shortages.
 - Suggested councils consider food resilience as an agenda item.
 - Overview of the Greening Campaign: bee squares, biodiversity, community engagement.
- **Navigating Change: Proper Practices & AGAR – Alan Mellor**
 - Changes coming in the 2026/27 Practitioners' Guide.
 - Town and parish councils raised £942m in 2026/27.
 - SAPP reviewing reporting categories to improve public understanding.
 - Encouraged clerks to consider internal auditor training due to national shortage.

- **Assertion 10 Compliance – Mark Tomkins**
 - Strong reminder for councillors to delete old Gmail accounts due to data protection risks.
 - .gov.uk domains provide access to GDS services including GOV Pay.
 - Emphasis on website compliance and checking PDF accessibility.
- **Shared Decision-Making for Neighbourhoods – Jonathan Eddy (DLUHC)**
 - Overview of neighbourhood governance and strengthening community voice.
- **Multi-Location Meetings – Emma Smith (Wales)**
 - Wales’ experience suggests England is likely to permit remote meetings.
 - Councils advised to begin planning and budgeting for equipment.

2. SLCC Devon & Cornwall Joint Branch Meeting

Date: 17 June

Time attended: 10:15–15:15

Key Updates & Learning

- **SLCC Update – Rob Smith, CEO**
 - LGR decision expected summer; shadow elections May 2027; new unitary from 1 April 2028.
 - Intention to pass remote meeting legislation.
 - Launch of SLCC-e (climate resources).
 - Job evaluation spreadsheet under review by Improvement & Development Board.
 - “Smart Search” launched to help clerks find advice notes.
 - External auditor fee may be refunded for councils using the AGAR portal in 2027.
 - SAAA funding a Finance Regional Seminar in Saltash on 26 November.
- **Managing Conflict in Parish & Town Councils – DALC**
 - Practical session on recognising conflict triggers and managing difficult behaviours.
- **CCLA Finance Update – Mark Davies**

- Public Sector Deposit Fund overview: tracks base rate, low-risk, currently ~3.71% interest.
- £120,000 covered by compensation scheme.
- Portal planned to remove need for downloadable forms.
- Councils can request single-authority access for clerk transfers.
- **Terrorism (Protection of Premises Act 2025) – Helen Ball**
 - MPC unlikely to fall within statutory scope but has a moral duty to consider terrorism risks.
 - Parish councils are “soft targets” due to lower preparedness.
 - Emphasis on proportionate risk awareness and preventative steps.
- **Properties: Freehold Acquisition, Leases & Licences – Stephens Scown LLP**
 - Overview of relevant powers:
 - LGA 1972 s124 (acquire land), s126 (dispose), s137 (raise finance).
 - Strong emphasis on due diligence: surveys, environmental checks, CPSE replies, titles, covenants, overage, minerals, trusts, searches.
 - Do not commit to contracts prematurely; always state “subject to contract”.
 - Freehold transfers must be in writing, signed by both parties, and registered within two months.
 - Reminder to check for implied novation of existing contracts (e.g., legionella) when acquiring assets.
- **DALC/CALC Update**
 - DALC now offering a payroll service.
 - Conference on 7 October focused on LGR.
- **Branch Business & Open Session**
 - Updates from SLCC Board and National Forum representatives.
 - Open discussion on issues raised by members.