

Date: 5th October 2017

Title: Report Item 9 – Local Council Award Scheme

By: K Larkin (Parish Clerk)

Purpose: To provide an overview of the scheme and of the council's current standing

Recommendations: a) To note the report
b) To agree to work towards the Gold award in 2019

1. The Local Council Award Scheme was created in 2014 as a successor to the old Quality Council scheme. It offers councils 'the opportunity to show that they meet the standards set by the sector, assessed by their peers, and to put in place the conditions for continued improvement'.
2. The scheme was discussed at recent meeting of clerks serving in the Wealden District, and was felt to be unsatisfactory. Councils can apply for an award at one of three levels: Foundation, Quality or Gold, and the eligibility criteria for the Quality and Gold awards include the requirement that at least two thirds of the council members must be elected rather than co-opted, and that the clerk must have an appropriate qualification. These are the conditions which enable a council to formally adopt the General Power of Competence under the Localism Act 2011. The view of the clerks was that it is only the ability to exercise the GPC which has any real value. Even the Gold award adds nothing to the council's powers or budget: just a logo for the website. If the council ceased to meet the criteria for exercising the GPC, presumably the Gold mark would have to be taken down and replaced by the Foundation mark, even though the council would still be operating in substantially the same way, and would be entitled to continue with actions begun under the GPC. The meeting concluded that the application procedure would be time consuming but that an award under the scheme would have very limited value.
3. Unfortunately, following recent changes in membership, East Dean & Friston parish council is one elected member short of the GPC criteria. Realistically, that cannot be changed before the next general parish council elections in May 2019. It is therefore only possible at present for the council to apply for the Foundation Award. Currently in the Wealden District no parish council has an LCAS award, though a few of the town councils have the Foundation award. Bearing in mind that this is the fourth year of operation of the scheme, the take-up is very low. However, if the parish council so wishes, it could overhaul its working practices so that it would be in a position to apply in May 2019, following the next general parish elections.

4. The changes that would be required would centre on two areas, namely (1) improving online communications – possibly involving a new website and use of social media; and (2) training – adopting a policy of training all new members and officers, particularly with regard to financial management, and keeping an annual record of training, so that it is regularly refreshed.