



Date: 07 April 2022

Title: Report Item 13 – Local Council Award Scheme

By: K Larkin (Parish Clerk)

Purpose: To provide an update on the council's readiness to apply for the LCAS Foundation Award

Recommendations: To note the report and further preparations required

Introduction

1. At the March parish council meeting (3rd March 2022) it was agreed that the council should register to apply for a Local Council Award Scheme Foundation award not later than the end of April 2022 [Minute C.532] i.e. before the Annual Village Meeting scheduled for 20th May 2022. Once registered, the council must supply all the information required by NALC within 12 months. To achieve a foundation award the council must demonstrate that it has the documentation and information in place for operating lawfully and according to standard practice; and that it has policies for training councillors and officers and is building a foundation for improvement and development. The council must also confirm by resolution at a full council meeting that it recognises its duties in relation to bio-diversity; and crime and disorder. The criteria to be met are set out in three groups covering Governance, Community and Development, as follows:

Governance

2. The council must meet criteria demonstrating good governance in managing the business and finances of a council. To satisfy this requirement, the following documentation and information must be in place, up to date, and compliant with NALC guidance:

- Standing orders
- Financial regulations
- Code of Conduct and a link to councillors' registers of interests
- Publication Scheme
- Last Annual return
- Transparent information about council payments
- Minutes for at least one year of full council meetings and (if relevant) all committee and sub-committee meetings
- Current agendas
- The budget and precept information for the current or next financial year
- complaints procedure

- accessibility statement
- privacy notice
- risk management policy
- A register of assets
- Contracts for all members of staff
- Up-to-date insurance policies that mitigate risks to public money

4. This information is all available but the presentation could be improved. In particular, there is no single convenient source for financial information which is split between several pages of the website. The clerk will work to improve this, with technical advice from Vision ICT.

Community

4. The council must meet criteria demonstrating its role in the community and how it engages with the community. It must have:

- Council contact details and councillor information in line with the Transparency Code
- Action Plan for the current year – a new plan to be drawn up after the AVM. As a minimum this should be a one-page document listing the council's objectives for the current year.
- Evidence of consulting the community – The panel seeks at least one piece of evidence from council publicity that it consults and actively serves its community. Publicity might include an annual report, web material or news bulletins. The information gives a flavour of any council activity such as lobbying principal authorities, giving grants to community groups, the provision of a service or helping with community events.
- Publicity advertising council activities – this is done regularly, via website, notice boards and council Residents' Alerts email register
- Evidence of participating in town and country planning – the council has a Planning Committee for which full documentation is provided on the website

Development

5. This group of criteria represent the potential for council improvement through the management and development of staff and councillors. There must be:

- Disciplinary and grievance procedures
- A policy for training and development of staff and councillors – this can be a short statement of intent. Currently, the council has a budget, which is used, but there is no formal policy.
- A record of all training undertaken by staff and councillors in the last year – a training record should give dates, titles and providers of development activities undertaken by named individuals in the last year, including, for example, events, online courses, learning on the job and qualifications. Councillors undertake a range of development activities such as attending conferences, undertaking training, or reading about developments in the sector. Four new councillors have all undertaken training, as has the Chair who was newly appointed to that office last summer. In addition, one councillor has had planning training and one has attended a NALC course on Biodiversity net gain.

- A clerk who has achieved 12 Continuing Professional Development (CPD) points in the last year – gained from attending conferences, undertaking training, mentoring, or reading about developments in the sector. The clerk's training record should include evidence of CPD, and CPD points are allocated according to a published system. A log can be kept on the SLCC website. The clerk did no formal training last year, but has gained new experience in mentoring the Admin Officer, and has complied with an Intermediate Level Review conducted by the External Auditor. She has also attended an HMRC webinar on Making Tax Digital (a new VAT requirement from HMRC which takes effect on 1st April 2022). Up to six of the 12 credits required can be allocated for informal training. The clerk has now opened a CPD training record on the SLCC website.

Submission of Evidence

6. Once the council has registered, paid the registration fee of £50, and has resolved that it is ready to submit its evidence to the accreditation panel, it must notify the accreditation panel co-ordinator and provide full information, including webpage addresses to where the information can be found online. At this stage an accreditation fee of £80 is payable. The process must be completed within 12 months of registration. The accreditation panel will be set up by the local County Association of Local Councils.

7. The three award levels (Foundation, Quality and Gold) are cumulative, so that if the council wanted to apply for the next level up within twelve months of getting a Foundation Award, it could simply supply the extra evidence required, and continue to use its original submission as current evidence. Further fees would be payable, but at a discount.