

POLICY, GOVERNANCE & FINANCE COMMITTEE

Date: Monday, 29 July 2024

Title: Local Council Award Scheme

Contact Officer: Deputy Town Clerk

Background

The National Association of Local Councils Award Scheme offers Councils the opportunity to show they meet the standards set by the sector and to put in place the conditions for continued improvement in terms of best practice in governance and transparency.

There are three awards available to parish and town councils, Foundation, Quality & Gold. Officers would like to attain the Foundation Award in the current year and then work towards Gold by the end of the Council term. Criteria For the Quality Award is attached as **Appendix A**.

Current Situation

There are surprisingly very few duties, or activities, that a local council must carry out in law to deliver services to local people. A local council must:

- Comply with its obligations under the *Freedom of Information Act 2000* the *Data Protection Act 2018* and the *Equality Act 2010*
- Publish certain information such as annual accounts, notice of meetings, agendas, and meeting notes
- Comply with the relevant Local Government Transparency Code
- Comply with employment law
- Consider the impact of their decisions on reducing crime and disorder in their area (*Section 17 of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998*)
- Consider the protection of biodiversity in carrying out their function (*Natural Environment & Rural Communities Act 2006*)
- Consider the provision of allotments if there is demand from residents and it is reasonable to do so
- Decide whether to adopt a churchyard when it is closed, if asked to do so by the Parochial Church Council

The Council complies with all of the above duties. Officers have amended the Committee reports template to encompass the above points into impact assessments for all Council functions and activities, where applicable.

In order to achieve the NALC Local Council Awards Scheme Foundation status, the Council must first meet the criteria for the Foundation Award and resolve that it has the following and publishes them online:

Table 1

| Governance | |
|---|--|
| Standing Orders | The current Standing Orders were adopted in February 2022. The next review is due in February 2025. They are viewable here WTC Standing Orders |
| Financial Regulations | These were reviewed in 2023. The next review is when legal changes are required. WTC Financial Regulations |
| Code of Conduct & link to Councillor's register of interests | The Council adopted the Oxfordshire Code of Conduct in May 2023. Register of Interests are listed on the Town Council's website under each Councillor WTC Code of Conduct |
| Publication Scheme | Is published on the Town Council's website here WTC Publication Scheme |
| Last Annual Return | Is published on the Town Council's website here WTC Annual Return 2023-24 |
| Transparent Information about Council Payments | In line with the transparency code, payments over £500 can be viewed on the Council's website here WTC Payments over £500 2023-24 |
| A calendar of meetings, including the annual meeting of electors | Is published on the Town Hall noticeboard and its website here WTC Meetings Calendar |
| Minutes for at least one year of full council, committee and sub-committee meetings | Are viewable on the Council's website under each Committee here WTC Agendas & Minutes |
| Current Agendas | Are viewable on the Council's website under each Committee as above |
| The budget and precept information for the current or next financial year | Is viewable on the Council's website here WTC 2024 Council Precept & Budget |
| Complaints procedure | Is viewable on the Council's website here Complaints Procedure |
| Accessibility Statement | Is viewable on the Council's website here WTC Accessibility Statement |
| Privacy Notice | Is viewable on the Council's website here WTC Privacy Notice |
| Community | |
| Council Contact Details & Information in line with the Transparency Code | Councillors' names and email addresses are published on the Council's website here WTC Councillors |
| Its Action Plan for the year ahead | The Council has action plans for each committee for the forthcoming year, agreed in May/June 2024 which can be seen here WTC Committee Action Plans 2024-25 |
| Evidence of consulting the community | Council consultations occur throughout the year. The most popular is the Annual residents' survey which is delivered to every household in February. The Council's consultation page can be seen here WTC Consultations |
| Publication of Council activities | The Council publishes its activities on a number of social media, online and hard copy outlets. For the purpose of this award, the quarterly newsletter can be viewed on the website here (Awaiting link) |
| Evidence of participating in town and county planning | The Council convenes a meeting of the Climate, Biodiversity & Planning Committee every three weeks. Details of planning responses can be seen in the minutes published here WTC Climate, Biodiversity & Planning Minutes - 6 June 2024 |

The Council must also resolve that it has:

Table 2

| Governance | |
|---|--|
| A Risk Management Policy | An updated Risk Management Policy was adopted by the Council on 25 March 2024 |
| A Register of Assets | A register of Assets is maintained by Officers. The RFO is currently updating the register. |
| Contracts for all members of staff | All staff are employed under an appropriate contract |
| Up-to-date insurance policies that mitigate the risk to public money | The Town Council's current insurance policy runs from 1 April 2024-31 March 2025. It includes Employers Liability, Public Liability, Motor Vehicles, Money, All Risks and Fidelity Guarantee up to the sum of £5m and more. |
| Development | |
| Disciplinary & Grievance procedures | The Council has disciplinary and grievance procedures set out in the Staff Handbook issued to all staff |
| A policy for training new staff and councillors | New staff undergo induction training and specific in-house training for their roles. Statutory training modules are in place regarding health & safety and data protection. The Council retains an annual budget for staff training. New Councillors receive an induction pack which has a statement regarding Councillor training and its importance in development in the role. The Council retains an annual budget for Councillor training. |
| A record of all training undertaken by staff and councillors in the last year | All staff training is requested and logged on an internal HR platform, Breathe HR. It is confirmed via 1:1 meetings and/or via submission of a Training Needs Analysis Form. Councillor training can be viewed on the Council's website under each individual Councillor |
| A Clerk who has achieved 12 CPD points in the last year | The Town Clerk has achieved 12 CPD points in the last year. |

Risk

In decision making Councillors should give consideration to any risks to the Council and any action it can take to limit or negate its liability.

Attaining the NALC award(s) demonstrates the Council's compliance with statutory governance and transparency requirements.

Social Value

Social value is the positive change the Council creates in the local community within which it operates.

Financial implications

- The cost of applying for the Foundation Award of the Local Council Award Scheme is £80.00
- This can be funded from budget line 4024/702 – Democratic Representation & Management Subscriptions.

Recommendations

Members are invited to note the report and consider the following:

- That, the Council recognises its duties in relation to the *Crime and Disorder Act 1998*.
- That, the Council recognises its duties in relation Biodiversity under the *Natural Environment & Rural Communities Act 2006*.
- That, the Town Council resolves that it has the necessary documents, policies and procedures as set out in Table 1 of the report and publishes them online.
- That, the Town Council resolves that it has the necessary documents, policies and procedures as set out in Table 2 of the report.
- That, the status is reviewed annually to confirm eligibility.