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**Agenda Item:** NALC – Local Council Award Scheme

**Meeting Date:** Monday, 9 December 2024

**Contact Officer:** Deputy Town Clerk

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The purpose of this report is to advise Members of changes to the Local Council Award Scheme criteria which effect its application and for the Council to resolve it has the necessary documents and policies to apply for an award.

### **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 which have been changed to, Bronze, Silver & Gold since the Council last discussed this on 29 July (minute number 444 refers).

Officers would like to attain the Bronze Award in the current year, silver within 12 months. and then work towards Gold by the end of the Council term in 2027.

### **Current Situation**

Since the above meeting, the criteria for applying for the awards has changed and include the amendments below.

#### Bronze Award

- Evidence of publicising elections and vacancies on the Council.
- Signed up to the Civility & Respect Pledge, including adopting a Dignity at Work Policy.
- The guidance related to staff contracts and risk management have been amended to include that the risk management policy shows the council has considered all relevant risks to the council, including but not limited to health and safety.
- Evidence the council has a Biodiversity policy.
- Evidence of considering the impact of their functions and decisions on crime and disorder in their local area.

## Silver Award

- At least two-thirds of its councillors who stood for election, or significant evidence of the Council advertising vacancies  
AND  
Evidence of encouraging public in engagement in local democracy  
AND  
A Co-option Policy

The Council complies with all of its statutory duties which are set out in more detail in the report of 29 July 2024. 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 Bronze Award status, the Council must first meet the criteria for award and resolve that it has the following and publishes them online:

<b>Governance</b>	
Standing Orders	The current Standing Orders were adopted in February 2022. The next review is due in February 2025. They are viewable here <a href="#">WTC Standing Orders</a>
Financial Regulations	These were reviewed in 2023. The next review is when legal changes are required. <a href="#">WTC Financial Regulations</a>
Code of Conduct	The Council adopted the Oxfordshire Code of Conduct in May 2023. <a href="#">WTC Code of Conduct</a>
Publication Scheme	Is published on the Town Council's website here <a href="#">WTC Publication Scheme</a>
Last Annual Return	Is published on the Town Council's website here <a href="#">WTC Annual Return 2023-24</a>
Transparent Information about Council Payments	In line with the transparency code, payments over £500 can be viewed on the Council's website here <a href="#">WTC Payments over £500 2023-24</a>
A calendar of meetings, including the annual meeting of electors	Is published on the Town Hall noticeboard and its website here <a href="#">WTC Meetings Calendar</a>
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 <a href="#">WTC Agendas &amp; Minutes</a>
Current Agendas	Are viewable on the Council's website under each Committee as above <a href="#">WTC Agendas &amp; Minutes</a>
The budget and precept information for the current or next financial year	Is viewable on the Council's website here <a href="#">WTC 2024 Council Precept &amp; Budget</a>
Complaints procedure	Is viewable on the Council's website here <a href="#">Complaints Procedure</a>
Accessibility Statement	Is viewable on the Council's website here <a href="#">WTC Accessibility Statement</a>
Privacy Notice	Is viewable on the Council's website here <a href="#">WTC Privacy Notice</a>
Biodiversity Policy	Is viewable on the Council's website here <a href="#">WTC Biodiversity Policy</a>

<b>Community</b>	
Council Contact Details	Councillors' names and email addresses are published on the Council's website here <a href="#">WTC Councillors</a>
Councillor Information including registers of interests, in line with the Transparency Code	Register of Interests are listed on the Town Council's website under each Councillor here <a href="#">Link to Councillors Register of Interests (JA)</a>
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 <a href="#">WTC Committee Action Plans 2024-25</a>
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 <a href="#">WTC Consultations</a>
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 from the home page of the Council's website here <a href="#">WTC Autumn Newsletter</a>
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 <a href="#">WTC Climate, Biodiversity &amp; Planning Minutes - 6 June 2024</a>
Evidence of publicising elections and vacancies on the council	The Council publicises all town council elections on noticeboards, social media and website. Notice of the most recent by-election can be seen here: <a href="#">WTC - Notice of Town Council Election (Web)</a>

The Council must also resolve that it has:

<b>Governance</b>	
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.
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.
<b>Community</b>	
Evidence of considering the impact of functions and decisions on crime and disorder in the local area	All Council reports include a Crime and Disorder Impact Assessment which highlights and asks Councillors to consider crime and disorder. A report can be seen here <a href="#">WTC Council Report</a>
<b>Development</b>	
Disciplinary & Grievance procedures	The Council has disciplinary and grievance procedures set out in the Staff Handbook issued to all staff
A policy for training and development of 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.
Signed up to the Civility & Respect Pledge, including adopting a Dignity at Work Policy	The Town Council signed up the Civility & Respect Pledge in October 2022 <a href="https://www.witney-tc.gov.uk/civility-and-respect/">https://www.witney-tc.gov.uk/civility-and-respect/</a>

The next deadline for applications is 3 January 2025.

In addition to the above, the Council should note progress in applying for a Silver Award. To achieve this, the Council must also have the following items published online:

<b>Governance</b>	
A Health & Safety Policy	<a href="#">WTC Health &amp; Safety Policy Statement</a>
An Equality Policy	<i>Under review</i>
A Co-option Policy	<a href="#">WTC Co-option Policy</a>
<b>Community</b>	
A Community Engagement Policy involving two-way communication between Council and community	<i>This policy is currently being produced by the Communications &amp; Community Engagement Officer.</i>
Councillor Profiles	<a href="#">WTC Councillor Profile (JA)</a>
A Grant Awarding Policy	<a href="#">WTC Grant-Aid Policy</a>
Evidence showing how electors contribute to the Annual Town Meeting	<a href="#">Annual Town Meeting Agenda</a>
An Action Plan and related budget responding to community engagement and setting out a timetable for action and review	<i>A Strategic Plan and medium-term financial strategy for the Council will be finalised by the Town Clerk and RFO following 2025-26 budget-setting. The Council currently has an Open Spaces Strategy.</i>
Evidence of community engagement, council activities and the promotion of democratic processes in the annual report which is actively shared with the community, online material and regular news bulletins	<i>Annual Town Meeting Report Pack Newsletters News Bulletins</i>
Evidence of helping the community plan for its future	<i>Active participation and promotion of Planning &amp; Community Improvement Consultations Planning Responses – S106 Requests</i>
Evidence of encouraging public engagement in local democracy	<i>The Youth Council Newsletter Feb 2023</i>

And resolve it has the following:

<b>Governance</b>	
A Scheme of Delegation	<i>The Council has a Scheme of Delegation. An update is currently being prepared for review and re-adoption.</i>
<b>Community</b>	
At least two thirds of its councillors who stood for election, or significant evidence of the Council advertising vacancies	<i>All current WTC Councillors were elected.</i>

Evidence of customer service in how the Council handles correspondence with the public	<i>The Town Council has an Internal Customer Services Standards Policy which is currently under review.</i>
<b>Development</b>	
A qualified Clerk	<i>The Town Clerk is qualified.</i>
A formal appraisal process for all staff	<i>The Town Council has a formal appraisal process which is currently under review by the Council's HR Consultants</i>

## Impact Assessments

The Town Council has a duty to consider the effects of its decisions, functions and activities on equality, biodiversity, and crime & disorder. Consideration should also be given to effects on the environment, given the Council's Climate Emergency declaration in 2019.

- a) Equality – accreditation affirms the Council's commitment to ensuring equality in Council services.
- b) Biodiversity – accreditation affirms the Council's commitment to ensuring consideration of biodiversity in providing Council services.
- c) Crime & Disorder – accreditation affirms the Council's commitment to ensuring consideration of crime and disorder Council services.
- d) Environment & Climate Emergency – no direct impact from the contents of this report.

## 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. It provides a structured framework to initiate and plan the initial stages of improvement, fostering increased performance and confidence. Establishing policies for continuous development becomes a key outcome, aiding the Council in pursuit of excellence.

## Social Value

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

There is no direct positive change from the contents of this report, but the accreditation of the awards enshrines community engagement and will ensure services are delivered which will improve the lives of residents.

## Financial implications

- The cost of applying for registration is £50
- the Bronze Award accreditation fee for the Local Council Award Scheme is £80.00
- These costs 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 confirms that it has the required documents, information and conditions are in place (whether published or not) for the Bronze Local Council Award Scheme Award, and that these are published on the Council's website, where applicable and,
- That, therefore, as it meets the criteria, it wants to apply for the Bronze Award.