
Agenda Item: NALC Local Council Award Scheme – Gold Award

Meeting Date: Monday, 28 September 2026

Contact Officer: Deputy Town Clerk

The purpose of this report is to update on the Council's aspiration to apply for gold accreditation under the NALC Local Council Award Scheme.

Background

The National Association of Local Councils (NALC) Award Scheme provides Councils with the opportunity to demonstrate that they meet or exceed sector-defined standards, while also establishing a framework for ongoing improvement in governance, transparency, and best practice.

The scheme comprises three award levels: Bronze, Silver, and Gold. At its meeting held on 9 December 2024 (Minute No. 709), the Council resolved that it met the criteria required to apply for the Bronze Award, which was subsequently achieved in March 2025. The Council's aspiration was to progress to the Silver Award within 12 months, with the aim of achieving Gold by the end of the current Council term in 2027. The silver award was attained in March 2026.

The Society of Local Council Clerks (SLCC) describes the Gold Award as follows:

"The Gold Award demonstrates that a council is at the forefront of best practice and achieves excellence in governance, community leadership and council development."

To secure the Gold Award, a council not only fulfils all the requisites of the Bronze and Silver Awards but also provides additional evidence and statements showcasing exemplary governance, effective community engagement, and notable council improvement initiatives.

Current Situation

Gold Award

To achieve the Gold award the council must publish on its website:

Governance	
A business plan covering a financial forecast for at least three years linked to revenue and capital plans for the council and its community.	<i>A business plan covering a financial forecast for at least three years linked to revenue and capital plans for the council and its community.</i>

	<i>The Council has adopted a Corporate Strategy 2025-2029 and officers are enhancing the medium-term financial strategy.</i> <i>The Council will also soon be presented with an Infrastructure Funding Statement, informed by Committee, Resident's Survey comments, and Officer forward-planning.</i>
Community	
An annual report, online material, news bulletins, and other council communications with evidence of: - Engaging with diverse groups in the community using a variety of methods - Community engagement influencing council activity and priorities - A wide range of council activities, including innovative projects, that produce positive outcomes for the community - Co-operating constructively with other organisations - Active promotion of elections, including that at least two-thirds of its councillors stood for election	<i>The Council has produced an Annual Report since 2025 and has an active news section, social media platforms and issues a weekly round-up to the local press. In addition, there are three further newsletters issued online throughout the year in addition to one posted to every household in March.</i> <i>The Council has accessibility and language translation tools available on its Website and a Community Voices Group which it hopes to reinstate soon. Interpretation boards at play areas.</i> <i>The Council engages with the Community through various outlets, events and via Stakeholder, partnership, and organisation meetings.</i> <i>The Council undertakes a range of activities, all with the aim of producing positive outcomes – investing in facilities, sport and recreation areas, innovative projects such as St George's Day, The Station Detached Youth etc.</i>

The following criteria require statements (of no more than one page) that should be presented to the accreditation panel showing how the council:

Governance	
Ensures that the council delivers value for money	<i>The statement on ensuring value for money explains how the council reviews the quality and costs of its activities to confirm that the costs are appropriate. It may also include reference to criteria from the other award levels as a number of these criteria do provide evidence that the council offers value for money. The statement will describe to the panel how the council understands and upholds its responsibilities over use of public money and showing due care and appropriate processes have been followed. The panel will look for evidence of sound financial management and transparency, including that the council has had two consecutive years of unqualified audits and it would be desirable if the council published its internal audit report on its website alongside the AGAR each year.</i>
Community	
Provides leadership in planning for the future of the community	<i>The statement on leadership in planning for the future shows how the council engages with a range of activities that influence the planning system and facilitate community led planning. Activities may include, for example, identifying and representing community views on planning applications and local plans, working on parish or town plans, or holding community-led planning activities such as Planning for Real® or community</i>

	<i>conferences. The statement should include the council's approach to neighbourhood planning.</i>
Engages with the community on issues related to the environment and climate change	<i>The panel seeks evidence in this statement that the council has considered climate change and other environmental issues and has engaged with the community on these issues. The council will have considered how it can support or facilitate the community to take actions that could have a positive environmental impact for the local area, or more widely.</i>
Development	
Manages the performance of staff and the council as a corporate body to achieve its business plan	<i>The statement on performance management explains the processes by which the performance of the council as a corporate body is constantly improved and shows how the performance, skills, and knowledge of each individual in the council is managed to help the council achieve its objectives on behalf of the community. The statement also includes confirming that each member of staff has their own professional development plan and that the majority of councillors participate in a member development programme that is specific to their roles and the needs of the council. It is important to show evidence that the council is a good employer.</i>
Supports a culture of civility and respect in the council	<i>The statement will provide the panel with a variety of ways in which the council actively supports a culture of civility and respect. This might include information from council meetings where commitment has been made to civil and respectful debate. It might include council policies, training for staff and councillors related to code of conduct, NOLAN principles, and other relevant topics. The council might include information of where conflict in the council has been successfully managed and resolved. The statement might include supporting comments from staff, councillors, other partners.</i>

The deadline for the next round of applications is 4 January 2027, and officers are confident everything will be in place to resolve the necessary items to submit an application at the Full Council meeting on 7 December 2026.

Corporate Strategy

The Council's Strategic Plan 2025–29 sets out the Council's long-term priorities and direction, supporting its mission to 'make Witney a great place to live, work and visit.' This report contributes to the delivery of the following strategic pillar of the plan:

1. A Forward-Looking Town Council

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, showing 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 Gold Award accreditation fee for the Local Council Award Scheme is £160.00 (reduced as the silver award was received in the last 12 months).
- The cost can be funded from budget line 4024/702 – Democratic Representation & Management Subscriptions.

Recommendations

Members are invited to note the report.