

Quality Council Status

Background

The Rural White Paper - *'Our Countryside, The Future, A Fair Deal for Rural England'* (published in 2000) - indicated that the Government wanted parish and town councils to give local leadership at the heart of local governance. In other words the Government saw an important role for parish and town councils in representing local people and improving both the quality and range of local services.

The Government's support has continued with its localism agenda and the Local Government & Public Involvement in Health Act which continue to show that the Government wants local councils to show to their residents that they are capable of operating in an ethical way and that they are able to represent their interests effectively.

In June 2003, following an extensive period of consultation, the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM) published *'The Quality Parish and Town Council Scheme; The Quality Scheme Explained'*. The first edition of this guidance was published in October 2004. Both of these documents have been superseded by this booklet.

Parish and town councils of whatever size and whether rural or urban, are encouraged and able to work towards achieving Quality status. This is illustrated by the broad range of sizes of some of the current Quality councils, ranging from the 280 electors in Pertenhall & Swineshead Parish Council in

Bedfordshire to some 72,000 in Weston-super-Mare Town Council in Avon.

Quality Parish or Town Councils are expected to:

- be representative of and actively involve all parts of their community
- be effectively and properly managed, with members and officers upholding a high standard of conduct
- work closely with voluntary and community sector groups, and articulate the community's needs and wishes through effective communications, which might include the production of parish plans or other similar documents

and

- work in partnership with other local authorities and agencies and, depending on their size, be able to deliver local services which give the best deal for the local community

The Benefits of Quality Status

In addition to being able to demonstrate to local communities that minimum standards have been met, Quality councils will also be in a better position

to influence the decision making process and/or take on additional services and areas of responsibility from their principal local authorities.

Who benefits?

The benefits of this scheme affect three groups:

1. the community
2. the parish or town council itself
3. the principal local authority

1. The community:

- more responsive services - the Quality council will be capable of solving local problems without recourse to the principal authority
- real contact and discussions with its Quality council
- a local access point providing information on services
- a council which is more accountable, visible, representative and provides community leadership

2. Benefits to the parish or town council itself:

- greater credibility in the eyes of the local community, voluntary and private sectors, and principal local authorities
- greater civic pride
- more representative of the local community
- better ability to articulate the needs and wishes of the local community
- more will be achieved by working in partnership with other organisations
- ability to demonstrate that it is effectively and properly managed, which will instil greater confidence in the community
- can deliver more local services - if the council wishes to
- greater involvement by the voluntary and community sector and by principal local authorities (e.g. developing community led plans, market town health checks etc.)
- a better informed community
- a well trained clerk, through the Certificate in Local Council Administration (or University of Gloucestershire qualification in Local Policy)

3. Principal Authority benefits

- reassurance that the Quality council has been independently assessed and is therefore capable of working together with the principal authority to deliver services on their behalf or in partnership
- reliable evidence of the competence of the Quality council, through the four year re-assessment process
- proof that the Quality council is willing and able to be fully involved in local issues (this will be particularly valuable when implementing new initiatives)
- stronger partnership working, with the town or parish council bringing their local perspective and experience to the table. Quality councils should be

more innovative and pro-active, and will want to share their ideas and experiences

- increased confidence that the Quality council is representative, competent, well managed, and thus capable of taking on and sustaining an enhanced role.