

## BARLING MAGNA PARISH COUNCIL

Report to: Full Council

Report from: Clerk

Date: 12<sup>th</sup> July 2018

Subject: Local Council Award Scheme

---

1. All local councils want to serve their local communities and make a real difference to the lives of people that live there. One way in which the success of the parish council can be assessed is by comparing its achievements with those of the best-practice councils across the country, through the Local Council Award Scheme. This scheme was created in 2014 and is managed on behalf of local councils by the Improvement and Development Board of the National Association of Local Councils.
2. Councils of any size can aspire to an award appropriate to their budget and level of activity. They can apply for an award at one of three levels:
  - a. The **Foundation Award** demonstrates that the council meets the requirements of operating lawfully and according to standard practice
  - b. The **Quality Award** demonstrates that the council achieves good practice in governance, community engagement and Council improvement.
  - c. The **Quality Gold Award** demonstrates that the council is at the forefront of best practice and achieves excellence in governance, community leadership and council development.

Barling Magna is making good progress towards achieving the standards required of the Foundation Award, although there are still a few gaps in the evidence required. It is possible that these will be achieved met within the next 12 months. The criteria for seeking to become a Foundation Council are set out in an appendix to this report. The direct costs would be £50 to register and £80 for the assessment. The Council would be expected to set a training budget at a reasonable level each year.

3. Achieving the Foundation Award would be one way (among many others) for assuring local residents that their Council is working hard on their behalf and is committed to achieving the highest standards. The only ongoing requirement would be to keep our policies and procedures under review to ensure they remained best-practice and for staff to achieve a minimum number of Continuing Professional Development points.

### Recommendation

The Council is recommended to commit itself to achieving Foundation status within 12 months.

IK

TO ACHIEVE A FOUNDATION AWARD A COUNCIL DEMONSTRATES THAT IT HAS THE DOCUMENTATION AND INFORMATION IN PLACE FOR OPERATING LAWFULLY AND ACCORDING TO STANDARD PRACTICE. THE COUNCIL ALSO HAS POLICIES FOR TRAINING COUNCILLORS AND OFFICERS AND IS BUILDING A FOUNDATION FOR IMPROVEMENT AND DEVELOPMENT.

The council confirms by resolution at a full council meeting that it publishes online:

GOVERNANCE	COMMUNITY	DEVELOPMENT
Criteria demonstrating good governance in managing the business and finances of a council	Criteria representing a council's role in the community and how it engages with the community	Criteria representing council improvement through the management and development of staff and councillors
Its standing orders and financial regulations	Council contact details and councillor information in line with the Transparency Code	
Its Code of Conduct and a link to councillors' registers of interests	Its action plan for the current year	
Its publication scheme	Evidence of consulting the community	
Its last annual return	Publicity advertising council activities	
Transparent information about council payments	Evidence of participating in town and country planning	
A calendar of all meetings including the annual meeting of electors		
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		
Its complaints procedure		

The council also confirms by resolution at a full council meeting that it has:

---

**GOVERNANCE**
**COMMUNITY**
**DEVELOPMENT**


---

Criteria demonstrating good governance in managing the business and finances of a council

Criteria representing a council's role in the community and how it engages with the community

Criteria representing council improvement through the management and development of staff and councillors

---

A risk management policy

---

Disciplinary and grievance procedures

---

A register of assets

---

A policy for training new staff and councillors

---

Contracts for all members of staff

---

A record of all training undertaken by staff and councillors in the last year

---

Up-to-date insurance policies that mitigate risks to public money

---

A clerk who has achieved 12 Continuing Professional Development (CPD) points in the last year

---

This evidence is not posted online, the panel may ask to see the evidence if it is considered necessary.

The council notifies the accreditation panel co-ordinator when the resolution has been agreed and provides a completed application form, including webpage addresses to where the information can be found online.

## WHAT IS THE ACCREDITATION PANEL LOOKING FOR?

The panel seeks assurance that a council acts lawfully and according to standard practice. Unless it is a matter of law, the panel is not making a judgement on the quality of the evidence at this level; it simply confirms that the documentation and information is in place, up-to-date and complies with the guidance below. For those documents that are not posted up online, the panel may ask to see the evidence if it is considered necessary.

- All policies should comply with current legislation and guidance and note the date of the next review.
- Standing orders, financial regulations, the Code of Conduct, publication scheme and complaints procedure are public documents tailored to the specific council. Standing orders or financial regulations explain procedures for contracts and internal controls. There should be evidence of an open media policy which does not restrict engagement with the press. For councils with an annual turnover of less than £25,000 they also demonstrate compliance with the Transparency Code for Smaller Authorities.
- The council does not need to publish the councillors' registers of interests on their own website provided that there is a working link to the complete register of all councillors' interests on the principal authority's website.
- The council's website should include the name of the clerk and contact details (address, phone, email) for the council as a corporate body. It should also publish the names of councillors and councillors' responsibilities in compliance with the Local Government Transparency Code.
- The council posts up a scanned copy of the last annual return. The panel checks that the council has a limited assurance (unqualified) opinion from the external auditor; the opinion may contain recommendations for consideration as long as a qualified opinion is not given. The panel checks the arrangements for internal audit and internal controls. From 2017, councils with an annual turnover of less than £25,000 will not be required to submit their annual return for audit. Panels check that these councils comply with the Transparency Code for Smaller Authorities.
- Information on all payments must be transparent and in accordance with financial regulations and statutory proper practices. The panel will check the minutes of meetings, financial regulations, the annual return (if relevant) and compliance with the Local Government Transparency Code.
- The calendar (in any format) includes the Annual Meeting of the Council and the Annual Parish/Town Meeting and both meetings must be held during the correct statutory period. The calendar also shows that the council has at least four full council meetings a year.
- Similarly, the minutes for full council meetings over the last year include the Annual Meeting of the Council. If relevant, the council also posts up the minutes of its Finance Committee to demonstrate transparency according to statutory regulations and of its Planning Committee showing that procedures for reviewing planning applications are correct. The panel checks that minutes and agendas demonstrate the lawful convening of meetings and decision-making

and that all meetings allow the public to make representations to the council.

- The council can post up the current or next year's budget (or both). Budget documents would normally show columns comparing the year in question with the two previous years; they include information on income and expenditure (or receipts and payments) and show how the precept was calculated.
- The council must publish an action plan; as a minimum this is a one-page document listing the council's objectives for the current year. It is not a parish plan which is a plan for the future of the community; the council can extract objectives for action from the parish plan depending on its areas of responsibility.
- 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. For guidance, councils can refer to The Code of Recommended Practice on Local Authority Publicity. Similarly any form of consultation is suitable, including surveys, online polls, focus groups or public meetings.
- Council documents demonstrate that the council participates in the planning system by, for example, commenting on planning applications or working on a neighbourhood plan. Decisions on planning matters must be made in properly convened meetings and, if required, by delegation to a committee. Some decisions may be delegated to an officer.
- The panel may wish to check that insurance policies have been reviewed and are up-to-date and that the council recognises insurance as a way of mitigating risks to public money. The panel does not seek to judge the appropriateness of the insurance policies themselves.
- Contracts, disciplinary/grievance procedures, a risk management policy and register of assets can be based on a model but tailored to the specific council. They are not published.
- A training policy for new staff and councillors can be a short statement of intent while a training record gives dates, titles and providers of development activities undertaken by named individuals in the last year, including, for example, updating events, online courses, CPD activity and qualifications. Councillors should note that they should undertake training on financial management for which they are all responsible. In particular, the clerk's training record includes evidence of CPD such as training, conference attendance, mentoring and studying for qualifications. CPD points are allocated according to a system published by the IDB.