

Frequently asked questions

General

Q: Where does the concept of Quality Parish and Town Councils come from?

A: The Rural White Paper 'Our Countryside: The Future, a Fair Deal for Rural England, published in November 2000, recognised the important role of the first tier of local government and proposed a number of initiatives designed to enhance the role of parish and town councils. Subsequently, in June 2003 the Quality Town and Parish Council Scheme was launched.

Q: What are the aims of the scheme?

A: The three main aims are;

1. To provide a benchmark of standards for parish and town councils;
2. Enable them to work more closely with partners in the delivery of services and
3. Enable them to more effectively represent their communities.

Q: What are the main benefits a council would receive in attaining Quality status?

A: Quality councils will bring considerable benefits to the parish or town, principal authority and the community it represents. Quality councils will be in a better position to take on additional services and areas of responsibility from their principal authorities and can demonstrate to local communities that minimum standards have been met.

In addition, we are currently negotiating more concrete incentives for Quality Parish and Town Councils for the future.

Q: How many Quality Parish and Town Councils are there?

A: Currently there are 163 Quality councils (June 2005) but the figures are rising every day. For the latest figures visit [here](#).

Q: What would happen if my council did not go for Quality status?

A: Not being a Quality council will not affect your present activities or your statutory duties. However it is hoped that the majority of local councils will strive to achieve the Quality mark as demonstrable evidence of their competence as a local council and to take full advantage of the opportunities it presents.

Q: Will smaller parish/town councils find it more difficult to achieve Quality status?

A: The Tests are designed to be as straightforward as possible and to include measures that will enable all parish councils, irrespective of size, to attain Quality status. Some of the tests, such as the 'Communications' test, are flexible and include compulsory and discretionary activities that should help meet the different circumstances of parish and town councils.

Q: Are Best Value parish Councils the same as Quality Parish Councils?

A: While it is recognised that many of the 41 Best Value Parish Councils in England already meet a number of the Tests for Quality status, through their obligations of the Best Value regime, they are not the same as Quality councils. Therefore, Best Value councils will also need to apply for Quality status and will not be exempt from the tests.

Criteria

Q: What type of tests does a council have to pass to become a Quality council?

A: In order to achieve Quality status, parish/town councils have to complete a number of tests. These tests are split largely into seven categories;

1. Electoral Mandate;
2. Qualifications of the Clerk;
3. Council Meetings;
4. Communication;
5. Annual Reports;
6. Accounts
7. Ethical Framework

The tests are designed to ensure that the town/parish council is functioning as an effective, representative and active council. For further information, a copy of the Guidance 'The Quality Scheme Explained' can be downloaded from The Quality Parish and Town Council Scheme - The Quality Scheme Explained

Q: As part of the electoral mandate test, does a council need to require an 80% electoral mandate at the time of applying for Quality status or an 80% mandate at the last elections?

A: A council needs to have a minimum of an 80% electoral mandate at its last elections, even if the council does not have an 80% mandate at the time of applying for Quality status.

Q: As part of the 'Communications' category, does a council need to send a newsletter to every household in the parish/town to achieve Quality status?

A: The council needs to publish an informative quarterly publication (not necessarily in the form of a newsletter). This does not need to be sent to every household in the parish/town to meet the mandatory criteria of the Quality scheme. However, the council would need to make the quarterly publication publicly available (i.e. on their web-site, notice board, Village Hall, one-stop shops etc).

However, a parish/town council may wish to send a copy of their quarterly publication or annual report to every household. However, this is a discretionary and not mandatory part of the 'Communications' category.

Accreditation Process/Funding

Q: Who makes the decision on whether a council should be awarded Quality status?

A: In each of the county areas across England, there is an accreditation panel, established by NALC, in consultation with the Local Government Association (LGA) and Society of Local Council Clerks (SLCC) and other interested bodies.

The panel consists of between three and five members, approved by the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM) and the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA). Each member has relevant experience and knowledge. The panel will consider the application and supporting documentation.

Q: Who administers the Quality Parish and Town Council scheme?

A: Applications should be sent to the Accreditation Panel via the local county association.

Q: Is there a pass mark that councils need to achieve to become a Quality council?

A: A council must pass each one of the tests to become a Quality council. If a council does not meet the criteria of one of the tests it will fail to become a Quality council.

Q: Can a parish/town council appeal against the panels decision?

A: The panels decision is final, but where Quality status is not awarded, the panel will provide the reason for the decision. In addition, the panel will set out improvements that it considers necessary in order for Quality status to be conferred and will indicate a date on which it will reconsider the application, on condition that the necessary improvements have been made.

Q: How much does it cost to become a Quality council?

A: small fee is required to cover the administrative cost. This is payable to NALC and covers the cost to the County and National Association. The administrative cost depends on the budget of the council.

Q: We are a parish/town council with a very small budget. Is there any funding available to aid us in applying for Quality status?

A : A Clerks' Training Fund is available to aid councils with training costs. A Development Fund is also available for County Associations to promote and aid the Quality scheme.

Q: How long does the Quality status last for? When does a council need to re-accredited?

A: If a parish council is successful and is awarded Quality status, the accreditation process lasts for four years and up to three months from the date of notification. Applications for re-accreditation may not be made before the four year period expires. Instead there will be a three month 'grace' period following the end of the four year period in which a parish wishing to be re-accredited must re-apply.

The Future

Q: Will the role of Quality Parish and Town Council increase in the future?

A: Many councils that have already achieved Quality status have expressed an interest for the Quality scheme to develop further in the future, with the possibility of more responsibility and funding being available for Quality Parish and Town Councils. Please refer to the Training section for FAQ's on the Clerks Training Certificate.