

**TOWN CLERK BRIEFING NOTE**

**53 QUALITY COUNCIL STATUS**

The Council's (4-year) accreditation expires 14 September 2010. The first Quality Parish Council in Rother, Sedlescombe, has gained re-accreditation. Thus far, every Quality Council in England and Wales approaching re-accreditation is believed to have sought renewal.

As part of a Sussex-wide Local Area Agreement Quality Council performance target, Rye TC will receive a one off grant of c£1400 (payable in two equal installments – 2009-10 and 2010-11).

Since 1996 the QC accreditation criteria have become more stringent. The notable additional 'tests' being:

**a) Promoting Local Democracy and Citizenship**

Councils are required to evidence how they work pro-actively to support local democracy and citizenship. Probably RTC's weakest area – guidance note attached.

**b) Terms and conditions**

Councils with a paid Clerk are required to provide evidence that they have adopted (as a minimum) the NALC/SLCC Terms & Conditions of Employment and provide a statement that all staff have a contract of employment. The current Clerk is not employed under these terms and conditions – but something similar (old RDC conditions - modified). Further work will need to be undertaken to identify those areas which would need to be brought into line (identifying any potential cost implications).

**c) Training**

Councils are required to provide a training 'Statement of Intent' which shows that the council has identified key areas of training for both staff and members. Guidance note attached.

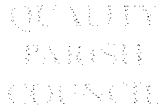
The QC renewal fee is £235 (incl VAT)

Other considerations:

- It is understood that Government Ministers remain keen on the status as way of improving local council performance and accountability – and that a Conservative administration would continue with the scheme (or something similar)
- Although QC status is not required to exercise the power of well being, this may not always be the case. The general view within the sector is that the two should go hand-in-hand.

A final decision to re-apply would need to be taken by the full Council.

19.1.10



## Democracy and Citizenship – A guide to Quality status

**Democracy** – ‘government by the people; a form of government in which the supreme power is vested in the people and exercised directly by them or by their elected agents under a free electoral system’<sup>1</sup>

**Citizenship** – ‘Citizenship is a term generally used in one of two ways. In strictly legal terms it refers to a person’s membership of a state or nation, and the legal rights and responsibilities that this brings.

In a wider sense it describes the process through which individuals engage and participate in society and how they exercise their rights and responsibilities.’<sup>2</sup>

In order to thrive, democracies need active, involved, informed and engaged citizens. Activities aimed at promoting democracy and citizenship can offer a great deal, they can show that local voices can matter; it can help to take the mystery out of local democracy, how it affects people and how people can personally shape it. Activities can help to inform young people about the democratic systems that make decisions on their behalf and how they can get their voices heard. They can help hard to reach groups to feel part of the community and they can encourage the wider community to get more involved in helping to shape the decisions that most affect them.

Re-engaging the public in the democratic process has become a significant issue in recent years and it is important that parish and town councils play their part. Research shows that people have become cynical about their elected representatives who often seem distant and out of touch with the wishes of their communities. However, parish and town councillors live and often work within the communities they serve, are highly visible and much more in touch with the wants and needs of the people they represent. Many parish and town councils

<sup>1</sup> Random House Unabridged dictionary

<sup>2</sup> ‘The Citizens’ Day Framework. Building Cohesive, active and engaged communities’ – The Citizenship Foundation

already undertake activities to bolster democratic engagement and the purpose of this test is to encourage more activities of this nature.

The purpose of this document is to provide some guidance and ideas for councils who wish to achieve Quality status.

The list below is intended to give a broad idea of the kinds of activities that would be appropriate for the 'Democracy and Citizenship' test. You should note though that this list is only illustrative of the kinds of activities you might wish to undertake and should not be seen as a set list. The test by its nature is broad and we would encourage innovative approaches. However, it is important that you provide evidence to your Accreditation Panel of how your activity promotes democracy or citizenship, what the aims of your activity were and what you did to follow-up or assess the success of an activity.

Suggested activities;

- Developing/distributing materials publicising the role of your council or councillors in the local community;
- Developing/distributing materials publicising elections. For example, posters leaflets, press releases;
- Working with local schools to explain the role of your council and councillors, local or national democracy or citizenship through visits or the provision of information;
- Distributing information on democracy or citizenship to local schools;
- Getting involved with activities promoted by the Local Government Association's 'Local Democracy Campaign';
- Involving your youth council or local young people in the decision making process;
- Setting up or servicing a youth council;
- Actively seeking the views of young people when undertaking local projects or initiatives;
- Specifically targeting information at the hard to reach members of your community, for example, ethnic minorities and people with learning disabilities;
- Undertaking activities aimed at encouraging people to register to vote;

- Developing/distributing materials that explain the process of voting;
- Liaising or co-operating with your principal authority to develop or deliver activities/projects;
- Holding events/meetings with a focus on democracy or citizenship;
- Working with local young people to develop or to help them to develop projects with a democratic or citizenship theme. For example, a recycling campaign;
- Developing/distributing materials encouraging residents to attend council meetings;
- Identifying a member of the council to act as “Democracy Champion”, to be responsible for these activities.

There are a number of organisations that can provide resources and advice;

### **Electoral Commission**

The Electoral Commission is an independent body set up by the UK. Their aim is to ensure integrity and public confidence in the electoral process.

Practical information about the democratic process including guidance materials and resources can be found at their website.

<http://www.electoralcommission.gov.uk>

The Electoral Commission's website 'About My Vote' provides information about elections in your area and helps people to register to vote.

<http://www.electoralcommission.gov.uk>

The Electoral Commission's 'Do Politics Centre' is a resource hub for electoral administrators, youth and community workers, teachers, and other practitioners interested in encouraging people to get involved in our democracy. The Do Politics catalogue features information leaflets, campaign materials and educational resources to help your voter awareness activities and events. What's more, all of the resources are available free of charge.

<http://www.electoralcommission.gov.uk>

### **Citizenship Foundation**

The Citizenship Foundation is a registered charity which aims to empower individuals to engage in the wider community through education about the law, democracy and society, focusing particularly on developing young people's knowledge, skills and understanding.

<http://www.citizenshipfoundation.org.uk>

#### **Citizen's Day**

The Citizenship Foundation's Citizens' Day booklet provides advice and guidance for local authorities, their partners in the voluntary and community sector and other organisations and individuals committed to building community engagement and cohesion through active citizenship.

<http://www.citizenshipfoundation.org.uk>

#### **Youth Act**

The national Youth Act program offers a variety of training packages to councils interested in engaging young people in citizenship, participation, community involvement.

[www.localdemocracy.gov.uk](http://www.localdemocracy.gov.uk)

### **Local Government Association**

#### **Local Democracy Campaign**

The Local Democracy Campaign is about getting young people more involved with, and aware of, their local council. Although aimed at the principal authority tier of local government the campaign website provides a number of ideas for engaging young people and a significant number of links to other relevant organisations.

[www.localdemocracy.gov.uk](http://www.localdemocracy.gov.uk)

### **The National Youth Agency**

The NYA supports those involved in young people's personal and social development and works to enable all young people to fulfil their potential within a just society. They can provide you with information and resources aimed at young people.

[www.nya.org.uk](http://www.nya.org.uk)

### **Improvement & Development Agency (IDeA)**

The IDeA works for local government improvement so councils can serve people and places better. The IDeA encourage people throughout the sector to share best practice.

[www.idea.gov.uk](http://www.idea.gov.uk)

### **Parliament Education Service**

Parliament's Education Service works with schools and Members of both Houses of Parliament to support young people in developing their understanding of Parliament and democracy.

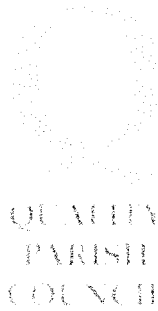
[www.parliament-education-service.org](http://www.parliament-education-service.org)

### **Parliamentary Outreach**

Parliamentary Outreach works with local networks and media, community groups, campaigners and non-governmental organisations to strengthen the connection between Parliament and the public.

*This is a live document. Should you be undertaking an activity which you think should be added to the suggested activities list please let us know. Similarly, if you come across an organisation that you think might have something to offer councils seeking Quality status let us know and we will be happy to signpost it.*

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## **Training – A guide to Quality Status**

Increasingly training is being seen as vital to the development of the parish and town council tier of local government not only for clerks but also, increasingly, for councillors (members).

### **Training ‘Statement of Intent’**

As part of the amended Quality Parish and Town Council Scheme councils are now required to produce a ‘Statement of Intent’ on training for both staff and members. This document seeks to advise you on what the statement of intent must contain and some useful context to base it on. It also details helpful links and contacts which might assist you in the writing of your statement.

### **What your statement of intent should contain**

Your statement should do more than just indicate your commitment to training (this is more than just a mission statement). You should be looking to include the following as sub headings and detail under each one your plans as a council in how you will tackle each issue:

1. A brief statement of your commitment to training.
2. A brief outline of who your commitment to training includes and what types of training it will cover.
3. How you will identify training needs?
4. How you will resource training to meet those needs?
5. How you will measure the impact of the training attended?

Before you begin it might be worth you considering what ‘training’ means to you as individuals and as organisations. Is it just about attending a session on a certain topic and feeling suitably briefed? Have you ever stopped to consider what training you or your staff and members might need and then planned attendance of training around these needs?

You may feel training is just another ‘buzz word’ that has no real relation to your work as local councils. The reality is that it is an integral part of the revised QPS scheme and needs to be treated with as much weight as any other part of your work.

## What is training?

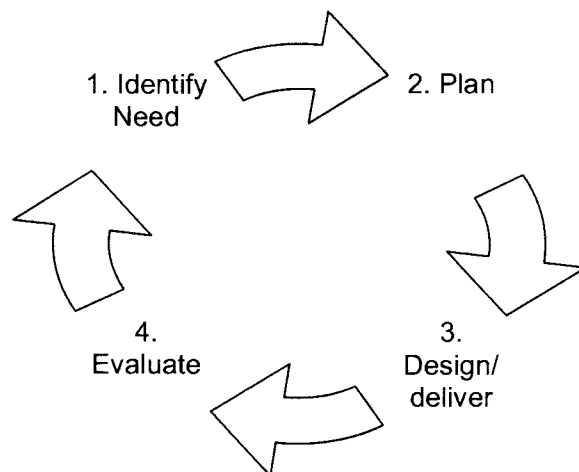
“A planned process to develop the abilities of the individual and to satisfy the current and future needs of the organisation.” CIPD 2007

In seeing training as a ‘planned process’ we hope you will begin to consider it as a function of your work like many others such as finance, legal powers and duties or planning. In fact training could be viewed as an over arching function responsible for maintaining effective working practices in all areas of your work.

Training can be divided into a number of different elements. Each may be carried out at different levels and different stages in the process of development, these elements are:

- identifying training needs – in the light of the overall objectives of the organisation and the requirements of individuals
- planning and organising training to meet those needs
- designing and delivering it
- evaluating the effectiveness of training

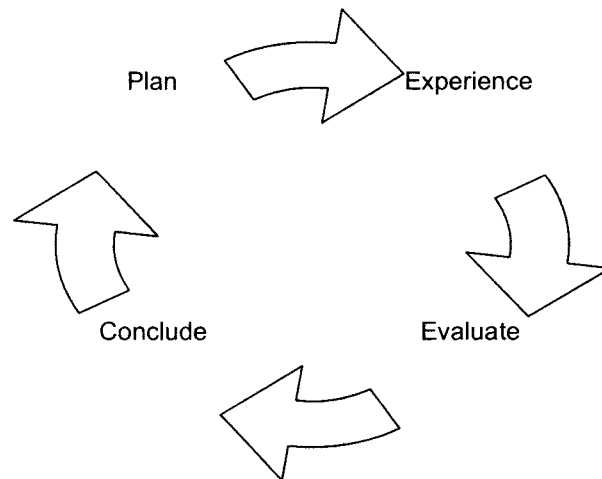
The following model may help you visualise this in the form of a continuous cycle:



Work to these four ends lies at the core of any training function whether it is carried out by one person or several, inside or outside the organisation. By approaching each step systematically, the process of learning can be more efficient.

This cycle can also be applied to the trainee or person undertaking the training

The delivery becomes the individuals experience, personal evaluation allows them to reflect on that experience. From this they are able to draw conclusions identifying new training needs which can be planned for the future:



You will notice that this cycle is not numbered this is because you can begin the cycle at any point.

## How might you identify training need?

There are a number of ways/methods that you might identify someone's training needs; here are a few to get you started:

- Staff appraisals
- Questionnaires
- Interview
- Formal and informal discussions

There are also a number of things which might require a person to need training, these include:

- Changes in legislation
- Changes in quality systems
- New and revised qualifications launched
- Accidents
- Professional error/mistake
- New equipment
- New processes/working methods
- Complaints to the council
- A request from a member of staff

## **What training resources might be available to you?**

If you have not done so already you should contact your local County or Regional Training Partnership (C/RTP) who will be able to support you with a calendar of events to support your training needs. Contact details of these can be found on the nalc website: [www.nalc.gov.uk](http://www.nalc.gov.uk) you might also visit the Society of Local Council Clerks website [www.slcc.org.uk](http://www.slcc.org.uk) to see how their network of regional training officers might support you in developing your training plans.

Through your C/RTP you will be able to access national initiatives such as the good councillor guide and associated training packs and also training in chairmanship skills if required.

## **Qualifications**

Through your C/RTP you will be able to find out more about nationally recognised qualification such as the Certificate in Local Council Administration (CiLCA) which meets the QPS schemes requirement for a 'qualified clerk'.

Most C/RTPs will run training and support of some description to support you in undertaking CiLCA so it is worth finding out what is available to you before you register.

Prior to undertaking CiLCA you may also look to find out about Working With your Council (WWC) which is a distance learning pack applied for through the SLCC (full details on the society's website).

Holding the University of Gloucestershire's Cert HE in Local Policy also meets 'qualified clerk' status.