
QUALITY PARISH AND TOWN COUNCILS - CONSULTATION PAPER (Min 451/01)

1 SUMMARY

- 1.1 This report details the consultation paper from the Department of the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) and the Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (DTLR). It also advises Members of the views of the Quality Parish & Town Council's Working Group in Appendix 1.

2 CHARTERED COUNCILS

- 2.1 All Parish and Town Councils will be required to be Chartered. Many of these Charter requirements put the onus on the Principal Authority, Rochford District Council, to provide help, advice and support.
- 2.2 Many of the Charter requirements for Town and Parish Councils are currently in place. Examples are provided in Appendix 2.

3 QUALITY STATUS

- 3.1 The Quality Town/Parish Council status is discretionary. To become a Quality Council, Towns and Parishes must achieve the following:-

Electorate mandate

Local Councils should have all their seats filled by Members who have stood for election at the beginning of each four-year term.

Number of Council meetings

Local Councils should hold at least six meetings per year (including the annual meeting), setting aside time for the public to participate.

Competent Clerk

Clerks should be able to demonstrate that they possess the necessary skills/competency to carry out their duties. They should refresh their skills/competencies every four years.

Published Annual Report

Local councils will prepare and make public an annual report by the 30th April of that year, to include:-

- A Chairman's overview of the councils achievements against previous action plans and targets and what plans and targets are for the following year
- An un-audited summary of the councils performance including details of any major projects and a statement of when and how the full accounts will be published

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- A list of council members and officers with contact details
 - Summary reports of all council meetings held during the year. The DTLR Guidance on Best Value will also apply to councils, which aspire to 'QUALITY' status.

Newsletter

Councils should produce a newsletter on at least a quarterly basis which would be made available to every household in the councils area.

Properly Audited Accounts

The accounts for councils wanting to quality for 'QUALITY' status will be audited by an auditor appointed by the Audit Commission.

- 3.2 The benefits are the agreement of the District Council to work with local Councils in the areas of:-
- a) Community Strategies
 - b) Information and Access
 - c) Land Use and Development Planning
 - d) Delegation of Functions and Service Provision
- 3.3 Parish and Town Councils can develop local plans covering community strategies and planning, which Rochford District Council would then take account of. It is reasonable to assume that the Town and Parishes would require support from Rochford District Council in developing their local plans, indeed it would be highly desirable to avoid contradicting local and district Policies and Strategies.
- 3.4 Enabling all Parish and Town Councils to become local information and access points would require Rochford District Council IT support, training support and information resource.
- 3.5 Rochford District Council currently delegates limited functions to Parish/Town Councils. Rochford District Council would be required to give local Quality Councils the opportunity to take on further services or functions, and consider further proposals from Parish/Town Councils to take on other aspects of delivery.

4 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 Many of the aspects of Charter or Quality Status required by Rochford District Council are in operation.
- 4.2 Quality Council status could bring a greater resource implication to Rochford District Council, in terms of advice and support, mainly of officer time, but are within the spirit of existing District Council and local Council relationships. The views of the Member Working Group are included in Appendix 1.

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- 4.3 Not all Parish and Town Councils within the District may wish or have the capacity to achieve Quality accreditation. Rochford District Council would encourage any that do wish to proceed to discuss resource requirements with the Rochford District Council.
- 4.4 Closer working advice and support with Quality Accredited Councils by Rochford District Council, may be perceived to be at the detriment of non-accredited local Councils.
- 4.5 Rochford District Council would be required to maintain a public list of Quality Town and Parish Councils. This would be an administrative process requiring some limited resources.

5 PARISH IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 The Consultation Paper impacts on all Town and Parish Councils.

6 RECOMMENDATION

It is proposed that the Sub-Committee **RECOMMENDS**

That the views of the Quality Town and Parish Councils Working Group form the District Council's response to the consultation, which should be received by DEFRA by 14th February 2002. (CEX)

Paul Warren

Chief Executive

Background Papers:

Quality Parish and Town Councils – A Consultation Paper – November 2001
Finance and General Purposes Report (06.12.01) – Quality Parish and Town Councils – A Consultation Paper – Item 12
Quality Town & Parish Councils Working Group – Notes of a meeting held on 3rd January 2002

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