

## YATTON PARISH COUNCIL

**Full Council, 16 May 2011**

### **Agenda item 20: Renewal of Quality Parish Council status**

#### **Report of the Clerk**

1. In April 2007 Yatton Parish Council was certified as a 'Quality Parish Council'. That accreditation expired on 23 April 2011. Last July the Parish Council agreed to seek re-accreditation.

2. Quality Parish Council status was introduced in 2003. The intention was to mark out those parish and town councils which have a democratic mandate, have qualified staff, meet regularly, follow proper procedures, communicate effectively and engage actively with their local community. There are currently 694 parish and town councils in England with Quality status (out of around 9,000). Quality status must be renewed every four years.

3. The benefits of Quality status are a matter for debate. Most of the tests that have to be passed represent things that the council should be doing anyway. The Quality 'badge' is a public mark that the council is doing the right things. There may or may not be more tangible benefits. Some principal authorities are more willing to work in partnership with, and delegate functions to, Quality councils. North Somerset Council does not currently give any special treatment to Quality councils and the Town and Parish Charter currently in draft does not suggest any change to this.

4. Quality status cannot be renewed before accreditation expires. The Parish Council then has three months to renew (that is, until 23 July 2011) before it loses Quality status. I understand that the accreditation panel of Avon Local Councils Association will meet in July (the Council does not have to be a member of ALCA in order to apply for re-accreditation).

5. Quality status is awarded on the basis of a portfolio of evidence showing that a number of tests are passed. I will have the portfolio at the Council meeting. In my view all the tests are passed.

6. The tests that have to be passed are as follows:

(1) Electoral mandate: at accreditation at least two-thirds of the members of the council must have been elected. 'Elected' means 'not co-opted'; it does not mean the election had to be contested. Yatton Parish Council has 16 elected members (out of 18 seats) so it passes this test.

(2) Qualified clerk: the clerk must have the Certificate in Local Council Administration, the recognised qualification for local council clerks. I was awarded this in 2010.

(3) Regular meetings: the council must meet at least six times in the year, public notice of the meetings must be given and there must be time for public participation. The council must publish draft minutes within two months of the meeting. Yatton Parish Council passes all these tests.

(4) Communication and community engagement: the council must have a website (with contact details for councillors and clerk) and an email address and must publish a newsletter at least four times a year, either free-standing or in a local freesheet. Yatton Parish Council passes all these tests (the newsletter is published in the Yatton & Congresbury Paper). In addition there are 17 further tests on communication and community engagement, of which at least 9 must be passed. These allow for various ways of demonstrating that the parish council communicates and engages with the local community. I have given evidence on 13 tests, including the community engagement strategy adopted by the Parish Council last year.

(5) Annual report: the council must publish an Annual Report by 30 June including an overview by the chairman, a summary of the accounts and contact details for councillors and the clerk. Yatton Parish Council passes this test.

(6) Governance and accountability: the council's accounts must have received an unqualified opinion from the external auditors and there must be an adequate system of internal control and internal audit. Yatton Parish Council passes this test.

(7) Code of conduct: the council must have adopted the Model Code of Conduct, including paragraph 12(2) (the provision that allows councillors with a prejudicial interest to speak during public participation). Yatton Parish Council passes this test.

(8) Promoting local democracy and citizenship: this is a new test. The council must demonstrate that it works pro-actively to support local democracy and citizenship in its area. Examples could be: active consultation with different parts of the community such as young people and hard-to-reach groups, actively encouraging people to register to vote and stand for the parish council, or a citizenship project with a local school. I have used as evidence the work done earlier this year to remind people to register to vote and to encourage people to stand for election. This included a presentation to Year 13 (rising 18s) at Backwell School.

(9) Staff terms and conditions: the clerk must have a contract of employment complying with the NALC/SLCC model and all staff must have a written contract of employment. Yatton Parish Council passes this test.

(10): Training: this is a new test. The council must have prepared a Statement of Intent on Training. The statement must consider the training needs of both councillors and staff and set out how those needs are to be met. Yatton Parish Council adopted such a Statement in November last year. On subsequent re-accreditations the council will also have to show that the statement has been acted upon.

7. I RECOMMEND that I be authorised to submit the portfolio to Avon Local Councils Association for appraisal. The cost is £240 (£200 + VAT).