

LEICESTERSHIRE LOCAL AREA AGREEMENT

STRONGER COMMUNITIES THEME

SCS/LAA Outcome - All Sections of the community are empowered

LAA Indicator - LI6 Quality Parish Councils

Version agreed Friday, September 25, 2009

In the first Local Area Agreement (LAA) a target was set to increase participation in Parish Council elections and the number of Parish Councils that had sufficient nominations to hold elections. The Association of Parish Councils was funded through the LAA to give capacity-building support. In this second LAA the Stronger Communities Board proposes to concentrate on increasing the number of Parish Councils who obtain Quality Parish Council (QPC) status and support those QPC in strengthening their communities.

In consultation with QPCs, the Board discovered that the work of gaining the quality mark was dependent on Parish Clerks gaining a qualification, a portfolio of evidence showing good practice and a high proportion of councillors being elected by the community. Experience showed that, whilst this work was hard, it was worthwhile to show that the Parish Council was open, efficient and accountable but that promised rewards for gaining the status, such as delegated powers or more funding, had not come about.

The Stronger Communities Board is keen to use the LAA to raise the profile of QPCs and enhance their potential. The following initiatives are proposed in the delivery plan:

- i. That in 2009/10 and 2010/11, £500 is given to each Parish Council, seeking QPC status, towards the cost of achieving it, up to a maximum of 10 each year.
- ii. All existing QPCs in 2008/09 (6 at present, 4 more expected by end of year) be given £500 towards an existing or new youth initiative in the parish in conjunction with the 'v' Youth Volunteering Project, led by Voluntary Action South Leicestershire.
- iii. All QPCs and Parish Councils in LAA Priority Neighbourhoods be supported by Stronger Communities Neighbourhood Workers and RCC Community Development Officers to implement the new "Democracy and Citizenship" test as part of QPC status.
- iv. Leicestershire Together partners, especially District and Borough Councils are encouraged to recognise QPCs and build a new relationship with them.

- v. The Association of Parish Councils be funded to give support to Parish Councils seeking QPC status and to work with Borough/District Councils and Local Strategic Partnerships seeking to work closer with QPCs in their district.

OUTCOME DELIVERY PLAN CONTENTS

SCS / LAA Outcome

All sections of the community are empowered to influence local decision making.

LAA Indicator, Baseline and Targets

Local Indicator 6 - Quality Parish Councils

The baseline is 6 with an additional 5 Quality Parish Councils in Leicestershire in 2008/09 and an annual increase of 10 in each year thereafter

Baseline	LAA Improvement Target		
	08/09	09/10	10/11
6	+5 (11)	+10 (21)	+10 (31)

Notes; 1 Figures in brackets are the cumulative totals
2. There are 165 parish councils in Leicestershire

Geographic Area Covered	County wide	Yes
	Other	Emphasis will be on parishes wishing to obtain Quality Status in priority neighbourhoods.
Any District or local targets		None

Outcome Delivery Lead Officer	Stronger Communities Co-ordinator
Outcome Delivery Partnership(s)	Leicestershire Stronger Communities Board

What do we do now to deliver the outcome?

Please give a brief description of the current approach used to deliver the outcome/target and the partners involved. Estimate of current resources used.

In the first Local Area Agreement the Association of Local Councils was funded to help build capacity in Parish Councils. This included work to increase participation in Parish Council elections and the number of Parish Councils that had sufficient nominations to hold elections.

In this LAA our tasks will be to:

- Market the scheme more intensely across the parish council sector including:
 - Running workshops at conferences
 - Distributing promotional material
 - Visiting councils that express a willingness to consider the scheme
 - Promoting the scheme on the Association's web site. and
 - Working closely with candidate councils to undertake a gap analysis of their current position and to help them develop an achievement plan.

- Once a council has committed to working towards the status we will provide:
 - Ongoing support in ensuring they are able to meet the standard. Part of this will include providing training for the CiLCA qualification (a prerequisite for the award) and advice on such matters as promoting local democracy and citizenship.
 - Prior to final submission we will review the portfolio of evidence to ensure that when it is submitted to the quality panel there will be no difficulties.
 - The final stage is to organise and present the case for the award to the Quality Panel.

We will be working over the course of the project to encourage Borough/District councils to work closer with their parish councils, especially those with Quality Parish Council status.

What options are there to deliver on the new target?

The options suggested to achieving the outcome/targets – what new interventions/services could be commissioned?

Options to deliver on the new target will include:

- Support Parish Councils in becoming Quality Parish Councils (practical and financial)
- £500 to each existing Quality Parish Councils for youth work
- Raising awareness around Parish Councils and Quality Parish Councils
- Encouragement of partners to recognise the Quality Status of Parish Councils

A background paper produced by the Leicestershire & Rutland Association of Parish Councils is attached as Appendix A.

What could we stop doing, do less of or better to focus on this target?

What options are there for reconfiguring or decommissioning other services to refocus on the priority outcome?

This is a new initiative identified by recognising the importance of building capacity in parish councils but with few rewards upon them gaining Quality Status. Partners can recognize the status of QPCs by giving them more responsibility, funding and opportunities to pilot ideas.

What alternative providers exist?

Commissioning – what alternative delivery agencies or partners exist?

None. The Association of Parish Councils is in a unique position to deliver the targets and will work with Leicestershire County Council, District Councils, Local Voluntary Action and Volunteer Centres and Rural Community Council (Leicestershire & Rutland).

What is the recommended approach and reasons why?

Options appraisal and recommendations on preferred option. Also include the extent to which the approach will contribute to other SCS/LAA outcomes?

The achievements to date show that things are already working notwithstanding the magnitude of the challenge. We have a number of councils that are actively considering going for quality status and we have one that has already submitted its portfolio of evidence. Please refer to the section “What do we do now to deliver the outcome?” above.

What is delivery of the target dependent on?

Include the assumptions being made in terms of preferred delivery option?

The LAA funding is of course a critical element, but also the continued existence of the Leicestershire & Rutland Association of Local Councils. The funding of which is largely by subscription but the additional funds provided by the Leicestershire County Council are important. The support of the DCLG to the National Association of Local Councils, in the effort to improve performance of the sector, is also a dependent factor.

What are the risks to delivery?

Include Key Risks to Delivery – likelihood/impact on target delivery and action required to mitigate.

Democratic apathy may mean the electoral mandate criteria is not possible to achieve in sufficient councils to meet the target. The work of the Stronger Communities Board may help to mitigate this risk, e.g. empowerment and building social capital.

It should be noted that the non alignment of timescales between the reporting of performance for the LAA and those within which Parish Councils can take action may mean a delay in achievement.

The actions required to mitigate the risks are those detailed in the section “what do we do now to deliver the outcome?” of this document.

Milestones/Timescales – Outline Implementation Plan

Include key delivery actions and milestones – by when?

April 2009 - March 2010	£500 given to each Parish Council seeking Quality Status (10 maximum)
April 2010	£500 be given to each existing Quality Parish Council for a youth initiative (10 maximum).
April 2010 - March 2011	£500 given to each Parish Council seeking Quality Status (10 maximum)

What resources are being provided by Lead/Partner Agencies.

LCC Core funds Association of Parish Councils.

Financial and other resources (if any) sought from LT for delivery?

Please provide estimate of costs and new resources required to deliver on preferred option.

- LRALC to be given £25,000 p.a. from the LAA2 for two years to work with potential QPC's
- £5000 for the youth initiative (from the NI 6 budget)
- In kind from the Leicestershire & Rutland Association of Local Councils supplementary time of its offices in the pursuit of this objective
- The National Association in terms of its development work on the scheme
- The time of the quality panel members

Who is involved?

Agencies that will be involved in contributing to target delivery.

Agencies involved will include the Leicestershire & Rutland Association of Local Councils, Parish Councils, Voluntary Actions, Leicestershire County Council and District Councils and LSPs through their Parish Council representation.

What contributions are expected from partner agencies?

Contributions are expected from District Councils on relationships with Parish Councils and Quality Parish Councils and staff time to enable this to happen.

Potentially all Leicestershire Together partners can contribute.

What are the communication channels?

Identify arrangements to communicate progress on the outcomes.

Promotional areas that will be used are:

- Stronger Communities Board Website
- Leicestershire Matters
- The Leicestershire Together E-News
- Leicestershire Together strategic board
- The Leicestershire Together executive
- Leicestershire Rural Partnership
- LRALC Newsletter and website

LEICESTERSHIRE AND RUTLAND ASSOCIATION OF LOCAL COUNCILS

Report of Richard Tobin, County Secretary, LRALC Re: Quality Council's – Revised Criteria

The Quality Parish and Town Council Scheme has undergone a review and the new scheme was officially launched at the end of June 2008. Some of the existing tests have been amended and some new ones added.

We are awaiting detailed guidance on some aspects of the new Scheme but the significant changes are as follows:

AMENDED TESTS

Electoral Mandate test

The requirement for an 80% electoral mandate at first accreditation and 100% at subsequent reaccreditation has been amended. **The new test will require that two-thirds of councillors have been elected to the council.** 'Elected' means that a councillor who has been elected at a contested election or stood for election but was elected unopposed. In addition, if bye-elections are held to fill vacancies on a council these new elected councillors will count towards meeting the test.

Communication and Community Engagement test (formerly the Communications test)

Two new requirements have been added to the mandatory requirements of the Communications and Community Engagement test. Councils will be required to **have a website which provides a list of council members and officers, together with details of how they can be contacted and access to the annual report.** They will also be required to have an **email address that is publicly available.** There has also been a change to the requirement for parishes to publish their own newsletter. **It will now be permissible for councils to publish their own newsletter or contribute a specific section to a community newsletter.**

Two new discretionary requirements have been added to the Communications and Community Engagement test to replace the website and email requirements which are now mandatory. The new discretionary options are for a **Community Engagement Strategy** and the provision of a **regular weblog on the council website or encouraging the community to engage through online forums or through online surveys.**

NEW TESTS

Training

Councils will be required to **produce a Statement of Intent on training for both staff and members** and **at reaccreditation provide evidence that they have acted upon it.** Councils reaccrediting that achieved QS on the original criteria will not have to prove they have acted upon a statement of intent as they will not have formulated one as part of their initial portfolio. However, they will be required to produce a Statement of Intent.

Promoting Local Democracy and Citizenship

Councils will be required to show that they work proactively to support local democracy and citizenship in the local area.

Of the new tests this one is of particular significance to the Stronger Communities agenda and I set out below a copy of the Guidance Note which I consider supports this. Whilst the Note lists a range of suggested activities (and, interestingly, six relate to youth) clearly many more will come into play as the Scheme proceeds. For example I would expect the Parish Plan process could appear under this heading.

Whilst the new Scheme has a number of positives, unfortunately there is still no direct financial incentive available to councils who achieve Quality Status despite representations by County Associations and the National Association. In one respect the new Scheme with its additional tests might even further discourage some councils from seeking QS because of the lack of financial incentive. It remains to be seen.

Currently we have six Quality Councils in Leicestershire with a further handful with which we are working currently and which have until 31st December 2008 to qualify under the current (i.e. "old") scheme. These councils are:

- Anstey (Charnwood)
- Earl Shilton (Hinckley & Bosworth)
- Great Glen (Harborough)
- Packington (North West Leicestershire)
- Syston (Charnwood)

Of these we are confident that at least three will actually proceed.

As far as the new Scheme is concerned, and bearing in mind the new test of promoting local democracy and citizenship. I hope the Board will support any financial incentive, however modest, which might encourage wider participation.

Richard Tobin
County Secretary

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’¹

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.’²

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 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.

¹ Random House Unabridged dictionary

² 'The Citizens' Day Framework. Building Cohesive, active and engaged communities' – The Citizenship Foundation