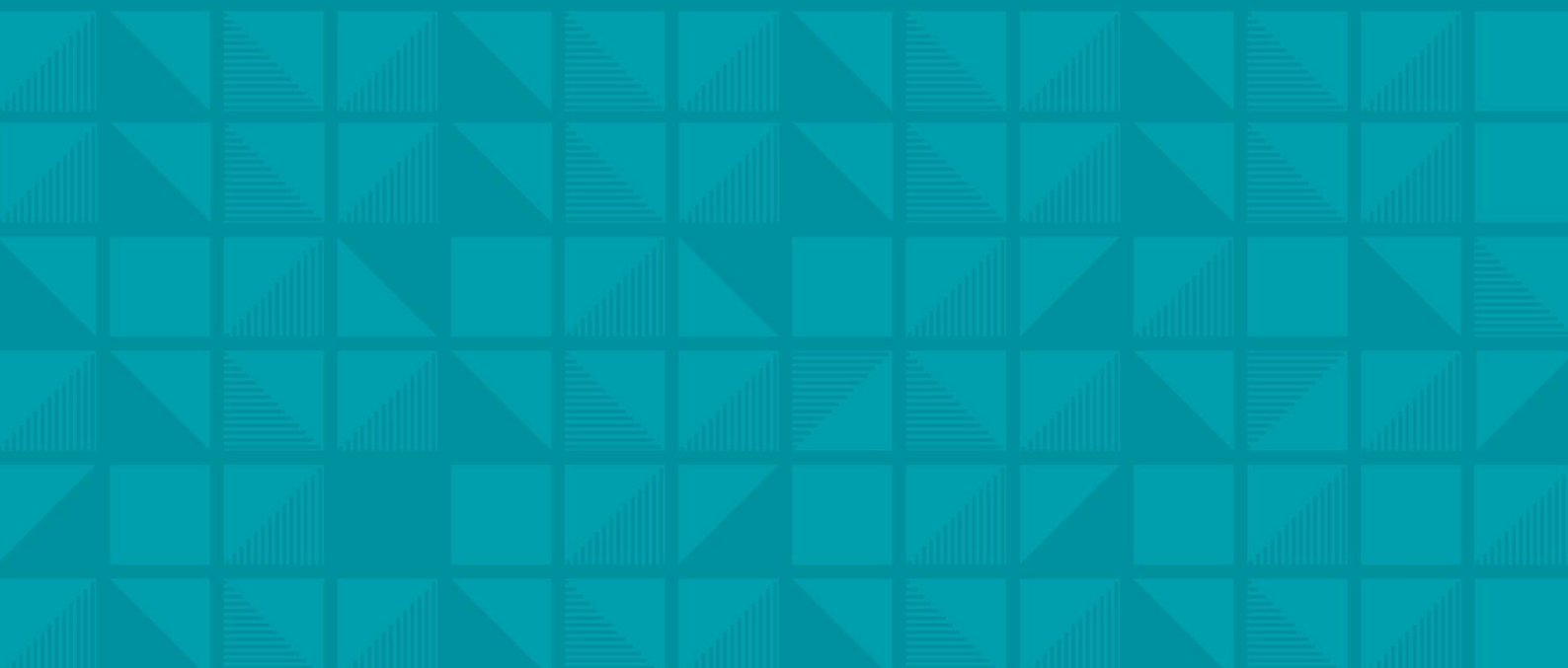


A guide to the Local Council Award Scheme



Published by the National Association of Local Councils (NALC)

The Bloomsbury Building
10 Bloomsbury Way
Holborn
London
WC1A 2SL

020 7637 1865
nalc@nalc.gov.uk
www.nalc.gov.uk

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THE LOCAL COUNCIL AWARD SCHEME EXISTS TO CELEBRATE THE SUCCESSES OF THE VERY BEST LOCAL COUNCILS, AND TO PROVIDE A FRAMEWORK TO SUPPORT ALL LOCAL COUNCILS TO MEET THEIR FULL POTENTIAL

All local councils want to serve their local communities and make a real difference to the lives of the people that live there. This scheme offers councils the opportunity to show that they meet the standards set by the sector, assessed by their peers, and to put in place the conditions for continued improvement.

The Local Council Award Scheme has been designed to both provide the tools and encouragement to those councils at the beginning of their improvement journeys, as well as promoting and recognising councils that are at the cutting edge of the sector. It is only through the sector working together to share best practice, drive up standards and supporting those who are committed to improving their offer to their communities that individual councils and the sector as a whole will reach its full potential.

The scheme was created in 2014 and is managed on behalf of local councils by the Improvement and Development Board (IDB). Councils can apply for an award at one of three levels:

- The Bronze Award demonstrates that a council meets the requirements for operating lawfully and according to standard practice.
- The Silver Award demonstrates that a council achieves good practice in governance, community engagement and council improvement.
- The Gold Award demonstrates that a council is at the forefront of best practice and achieves excellence in governance, community leadership and council development.

The scheme sets out criteria to meet at each level covering selected aspects of the council's work. Councils can seek to progress through the tiers over time thereby raising standards. Councils of any size can aspire to an award appropriate for their budget and level of activity.

To support transparency, every award level has a requirement for certain information to be published online (plus some information that does not need to be published). In all instances the council confirms that the required documents, information and conditions are in place (whether published or not) by resolution in public at a full council meeting. For Gold, councils also provide statements for submission to the panel demonstrating excellence in their activities. The panel may ask for additional information to check the accuracy of claims.

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This section sets out in brief what is required for each award and then explains in more detail the evidence that the accreditation panel is looking for. Councils should find this additional guidance helpful in identifying what is required.

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The Local Council Award Scheme is a form of peer review. Councils are reviewed by experienced peers through the work of an accreditation panel.

This section outlines guidance for the process for accreditation. These are not strict rules, and can be tailored to local need in consultation with NALC.

23 FEES

There are two fees:

- A registration fee paid to NALC
- An accreditation fee paid to the organisation responsible for administering the local or national accreditation process.

25 EVALUATION AND IMPROVEMENT

The aim of the evaluation and improvement process is to allow the sector to feel ownership of the Local Council Award Scheme, and to see the scheme changing to meet the feedback and needs expressed by the sector. This section outlines the evaluation and improvement process that will allow the scheme to be dynamic and respond over time to changes in the sector, national policy and other relevant issues.

BRONZE AWARD

TO ACHIEVE A BRONZE AWARD A COUNCIL DEMONSTRATES THAT IT HAS THE DOCUMENTATION AND INFORMATION IN PLACE FOR OPERATING LAWFULLY AND ACCORDING TO STANDARD PRACTICE. THE COUNCIL ALSO HAS POLICIES FOR TRAINING COUNCILLORS AND OFFICERS AND IS BUILDING A FOUNDATION FOR IMPROVEMENT AND DEVELOPMENT.

Before applying for the Bronze award the council confirms by resolution that all the required documents, information and conditions are in place for the Bronze award, and that these are published on the council's website, where applicable

To achieve the Bronze award the council must publish on its website:

Governance	Community	Development
<i>Criteria demonstrating good governance in managing the business and finances of a council</i>	<i>Criteria representing a council's role in the community and how it engages with the community</i>	<i>Criteria representing council improvement through the management and development of staff and councillors</i>
Its standing orders	Council contact details	
Its financial regulations	Councillor information, including registers of interests, in line with the Transparency Code	
Its Code of Conduct	Its action plan for the current year	
Its accessibility statement	Evidence of consulting the community	
Its publication scheme	Publicity advertising council activities	
Its complaints procedure	Evidence of participating in town and country planning	
Its privacy notice	Evidence of publicising elections and vacancies on the council	
Its last annual return		
Transparent information about council payments		
A calendar of all meetings including the annual meeting of electors		

Minutes for at least one year of full council meetings and all committee and sub-committee meetings		
Current agendas		
The budget and precept information for the current or next financial year		
It's biodiversity policy		

The following documents and information must be in place and evidence provided to the assessment panel:

Governance	Community	Development
Criteria demonstrating good governance in managing the business and finances of a council	Criteria representing a council's role in the community and how it engages with the community	Criteria representing council improvement through the management and development of staff and councillors
A risk management policy	Evidence of considering the impact of their functions and decisions on crime and disorder in their local area	Disciplinary and grievance procedures
A register of assets		A policy for training and development of staff and councillors
Up-to-date insurance policies that mitigate risks to public money		A record of all training undertaken by staff and councillors in the last year
		The clerk who has achieved 12 Continuing Professional Development (CPD) points in the last year
		Signed up to the Civility & Respect Pledge, including adopting a Dignity at Work policy

The council notifies the accreditation panel co-ordinator when the resolution has been agreed and provides a completed application form, including webpage addresses to where the information can be found online.

BRONZE AWARD - WHAT IS THE ACCREDITATION PANEL LOOKING FOR?

The panel seeks assurance that the council acts lawfully and according to standard practice. Unless it is a matter of law, the panel is not making a judgement on the quality of the evidence at this level; it simply confirms that the documentation and information is in place, up-to-date and complies with the guidance below. All policies should comply with current legislation and guidance and note the date of the next review.

Criteria	Guidance
Its standing orders Its financial regulations Its Code of Conduct Its accessibility statement Its publication scheme Its complaints procedure Its privacy notice	Standing orders, financial regulations, the Code of Conduct, publication scheme, accessibility statement, privacy statement and complaints procedure are public documents tailored to the specific council. Standing orders or financial regulations explain procedures for contracts and internal controls. For councils with an annual turnover of less than £25,000 they also demonstrate compliance with the Transparency Code for Smaller Authorities.
Its last annual return	The panel checks that the council has published its most recent Accounting Statements and Annual Governance Statement. Where the council is eligible for external audit the panel checks that the council has a limited assurance (unqualified) opinion from the external auditor; the opinion may contain recommendations for consideration as long as a qualified opinion is not given. The panel checks the arrangements for internal audit and internal controls.
Transparent information about council payments	Information on all payments must be transparent and in accordance with financial regulations and statutory proper practices. The panel will seek evidence that the council publishes information on payments in line with the appropriate transparency code. For smaller councils publishing payments over £100 annually and larger councils publishing payments over £500 quarterly. For more information see the Good Councillors Guide to Finance and Transparency.
A calendar of all meetings including the annual meeting of electors	The calendar includes the Annual Meeting of the Council and the Annual Parish/Town Meeting and both meetings must be held during the correct statutory period. The calendar also shows that the council has at least four full council meetings a year.
Minutes for at least one year of full council meetings and all committee and sub-committee meetings Current agendas	Minutes and agendas are published for all council meetings for at least the last year, including committees and the Annual Meeting of the Council. The panel checks that minutes (including associated papers) and agendas demonstrate the lawful convening of meetings and decision-making and that all meetings allow the public to make representations to the council. Draft minutes (marked Draft) of all council and committee meetings should be posted up as soon as

	possible after the meeting and within at least four weeks. The minutes will show that the council monitors its performance against the budget at least every three months.
The budget and precept information for the current or next financial year	The council can post up the current or next year's budget (or both). The council publishes detailed budget documents that include information on income and expenditure (or receipts and payments). Documents show how the precept was calculated and that the council understand the impact of precept changes on taxpayers.
Council contact details	The council's website should include the name of the clerk and contact details (address, phone, email) for the council as a corporate body.
Councillor information, including registers of interests, in line with the Transparency Code	It should also publish the names of councillors and councillors' responsibilities in compliance with the Local Government Transparency Code. The council does not need to publish the councillors' registers of interests on their own website provided that there is a working link to the complete register of all councillors' interests on the principal authority's website.
Its action plan for the current year	The council must publish an action plan; as a minimum this is a one-page document listing the council's objectives for the current year. It is not a parish plan which is a plan for the future of the community; the council can extract objectives for action from the parish plan depending on its areas of responsibility.
Evidence of consulting the community Publicity advertising council activities	The panel seeks at least one piece of evidence from council publicity that it consults and actively serves its community. Publicity might include an annual report, web material or news bulletins. The information gives a flavour of any council activity such as lobbying principal authorities, giving grants to community groups, the provision of a service or helping with community events. For guidance, councils can refer to The Code of Recommended Practice on Local Authority Publicity. Similarly any form of consultation is suitable, including surveys, online polls, focus groups or public meetings
Evidence of participating in town and country planning	Council documents demonstrate that the council participates in the planning system by, for example, commenting on planning applications or working on a neighbourhood plan. Decisions on planning matters must be made in properly convened meetings and, if required, by delegation to a committee. Some decisions may be delegated to an officer.
Evidence of publicising elections and vacancies on the council	The panel will seek evidence that when there are scheduled elections or council vacancies, the council informs the public. This includes displaying notices in conspicuous places within the parish and should also involve additional methods such as announcements on

	the council's website or in local newspapers.
It's biodiversity policy	The biodiversity policy will show the council's commitment to protecting and enhancing biodiversity in the parish. Including specific objectives, such as promoting habitat creation, supporting pollinators, or enhancing green spaces. Practical actions the council might take could include reviewing planning applications for biodiversity impacts, managing council-owned land for wildlife, or working with local conservation groups.
A risk management policy	The risk management policy shows the council has considered all relevant risks to the council, including but not limited to health and safety.
A register of assets	The register of assets can be based on a model but tailored to the specific council. They are not published.
Up-to-date insurance policies that mitigate risks to public money	The panel may wish to check that insurance policies have been reviewed and are up-to-date and that the council recognises insurance as a way of mitigating risks to public money. The panel does not seek to judge the appropriateness of the insurance policies themselves.
Evidence of considering the impact of their functions and decisions on crime and disorder in their local area	Evidence might include a published policy, or minutes of meetings, or other materials that describe council activities that relate to crime and disorder
Disciplinary and grievance procedures	Disciplinary and grievance procedures can be based on a model but tailored to the specific council. There is not a requirement to publish.
A policy for training and development of staff and councillors A record of all training undertaken by staff and councillors in the last year A clerk who has achieved 12 Continuing Professional Development (CPD) points in the last year	A training and development policy for staff and councillors can be a short statement of intent while a training record gives dates, titles and providers of development activities undertaken by named individuals in the last year, including, for example, events, online courses, learning on the job and qualifications. Councillors undertake a range of development activities such as attending conferences, undertaking training, or reading about developments in the sector. The CPD points are for the clerk in employment with the council at the time of application. The clerk's training record includes evidence of CPD such as training, conference attendance, mentoring and studying for qualifications. CPD points are allocated according to a system published by the IDB.
Signed up to the Civility & Respect Pledge, including adopting a Dignity at Work policy	The panel will ask to see the certificate that the council has signed up to the Civility and Respect pledge. A Dignity at Work Policy should ensure a respectful and supportive workplace by outlining expectations for behaviour, defining and prohibiting bullying, harassment, and discrimination, and providing procedures for raising and addressing concerns.

SILVER AWARD

TO ACHIEVE THE SILVER AWARD A COUNCIL DEMONSTRATES THAT IT MEETS ALL REQUIREMENTS OF THE BRONZE AWARD AND HAS ADDITIONAL DOCUMENTATION AND INFORMATION IN PLACE FOR GOOD GOVERNANCE, EFFECTIVE COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND COUNCIL IMPROVEMENT.

Before applying for the Silver award the council confirms by resolution that all the required documents, information and conditions are in place for the Silver award, and that these are published on the council's website, where applicable

To achieve the Silver award the council must publish on its website:

Governance	Community	Development
<i>Criteria demonstrating good governance in managing the business and finances of a council</i>	<i>Criteria representing a council's role in the community and how it engages with the community</i>	<i>Criteria representing council improvement through the management and development of staff and councillors</i>
A Health and Safety policy	A community engagement policy involving two-way communication between council and community	
Its policy on equality	Councillor profiles	
A co-option policy	A grant awarding policy	
	Evidence showing how electors contribute to the Annual Parish or Town Meeting	
	An action plan and related budget responding to community engagement and setting out a timetable for action and review	
	Evidence of community engagement, council activities and the promotion of democratic processes in an annual report that is actively shared with the community, online material and regular news bulletins	
	Evidence of helping the community plan for its future	
	Evidence of encouraging public engagement in local democracy	

The following documents and information must be in place and evidence provided to the assessment panel:

Governance	Community	Development
Criteria demonstrating good governance in managing the business and finances of a council	Criteria representing a council's role in the community and how it engages with the community	Criteria representing council improvement through the management and development of staff and councillors
A scheme of delegation (where relevant)	At least two-thirds of its councillors who stood for election, or significant evidence of the council advertising vacancies	A qualified clerk
	Evidence of a customer service in how the council handles correspondence with the public	A formal appraisal process for all staff

The council notifies the accreditation panel co-ordinator when the resolution has been agreed and provides a completed application form, including webpage addresses to where the information can be found online.

SILVER AWARD - WHAT IS THE ACCREDITATION PANEL LOOKING FOR?

The accreditation panel first checks that the criteria for the Bronze Award are in place if the award was granted more than one year ago. The exception to this is if the council received the Bronze award less than a year ago. Then the panel does not check the Bronze criteria again, but the council still confirms in a public meeting that it meets these criteria.

It then considers the additional criteria for the Silver Award.

The panel assesses the quality of documents and information seeking reassurance that the council is acting lawfully and according to good (rather than best) practice. The panel confirms that the documentation and information is in place and up-to-date and complies with the guidance below. The council is encouraged (but not obliged) to use a gov.uk domain for its website and email addresses for staff and councillors. All policies should comply with current legislation and guidance and note the date of the next review.

Criteria	Guidance
A Health and Safety policy Its policy on equality	The panel seeks evidence that the council has in place light touch policies for managing Health and Safety, including its duty of care to staff and promoting equality in compliance with legislation. For example, evidence might include employment documents or statements on agendas.
A co-option policy	The panel will seek evidence that the co-option policy includes a well-defined process for co-option, that the process is transparent, and where the council openly advertises seats available for co-option.
A community engagement policy involving two-way communication between council and community	A community engagement policy demonstrates the council's commitment to hearing what people in the community think and communicating its own actions and decisions.
Councillor profiles	Councillor profiles normally contain a photo and reference to the ward represented (if relevant) but personal contact details are not required.
A grant awarding policy	The council gives grants to community organisations and publishes a grant awarding policy.
Evidence showing how electors contribute to the Annual Parish or Town Meeting	Evidence that electors can contribute to the Annual Parish or Town Meeting can come in any form; for example, it could be an invitation to attend and participate in discussions or a record of how community groups spoke about their use of grant funding over the last year.
An action plan and related budget responding to community engagement and setting out a timetable for action and review	The action plan (or similar forward plan) summarises findings from community engagement and sets out aims and objectives that respond to community views. The action plan includes a timetable for actions to be completed with dates for reviewing the plan. The council's budget shows how the action plan is put into practice and manages risks to public money.
Evidence of community engagement, council activities and the promotion of democratic	The council is expected to produce an annual report, online material and regular news bulletins throughout the year. The annual report and news bulletins must be

processes in an annual report that is actively share with the community, online material and regular news bulletins	online even if they were also distributed in hard copy such as in printed newsletters or village magazines. If the council uses social media such as Facebook or Twitter, this will be evident from the council's website. The accreditation panel will read the materials looking for evidence of community engagement, council activities and promoting democratic processes. The panel expects to see that the council consults the community in at least three different ways (such as surveys, focus groups, online or street polls and community workshops) and engages with other organisations, including community groups and the principal authority(ies). It will look for at least three positive actions for the community in the last year. The annual report should be actively communicated and shared with the community. It might be produced digitally and/or in hard copy. It is accepted that it cannot always be distributed to all households, but digital versions could be distributed by email and social media. Hard copies could be left at prime locations in a community, including a library, doctors' surgeries, schools, pubs, shops or residential homes.
Evidence of helping the community plan for its future	The panel seeks evidence from council documents and online information that it supports the community in planning for its future. The panel seeks evidence that the council has considered environmental matters as part of how it plans for the future of the community. This may be through the planning system such as considering environmental impact in neighbourhood plans, or through engagement with the community. The council might also undertake activities to engage with the community on the environment outside of the planning system, this might include tree planting, litter picking, reducing carbon and addressing climate change.
Evidence of encouraging public engagement in local democracy	The panel will seek evidence of encouraging the public in engagement in local democracy. This might include campaigns to encourage people to vote or stand for election. It might include providing information on the council website on how the council makes decisions and how the public can observe or take part in council meetings.
A scheme of delegation (where relevant)	The panel may wish to check that a council properly operates the delegation of decision-making to committees, sub-committees and officers (where relevant). Arrangements for delegation may be set out in standing orders or in a separate scheme of delegation.
At least two-thirds of its councillors who stood for election, or significant evidence of the council advertising	At the time of making the resolution, at least two-thirds of the seats on the council must be filled by councillors who stood for election at either the last ordinary elections or a by-election. This shows that the council

vacancies	represents the community through democratic processes. Councillors who stood for election, even if elected unopposed, do count, while councillors who were co-opted or appointed cannot count. If two thirds is not a whole number, then it must be rounded up to the next whole number using the table below. The panel will seek evidence that when there are scheduled elections or council vacancies, the council puts significant effort towards informing the public and encouraging participation. The panel will be looking for the council to demonstrate it has done more than the statutory requirements of posting notices, for example posters in noticeboards, posts on social media, articles in newsletters, local newspapers etc.																
Total Council Seats	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	
Two Thirds	4	4	5	6	6	7	8	8	9	10	10	11	12	12	13	14	
Evidence of a customer service in how the council handles correspondence with the public	The panel seeks evidence of how the council handles correspondence with the public and takes a customer service approach. Evidence shows how the council plans for and manages correspondence with the public, this might include examples of the council has addressed complaints, queries and other communications in the past year. It might also include any policies or training for staff that illustrates the councils commitment to customer service.																
A qualified clerk	This criteria relates to the clerk employed by the council at the time of application. A qualified clerk is defined in Parish Councils (General Power of Competence) (Prescribed Conditions) Order 2012. The clerk (and deputy clerk) should be properly remunerated with a contract in accordance with terms and conditions set out in the national agreement or in a local government scheme.																
A formal appraisal process for all staff	The panel may ask to see the document setting out the formal appraisal process that must be in place for all staff. It checks that the council has a training budget and may ask to see a general training policy for staff and councillors with a detailed record of all training undertaken by staff and councillors in the last year. The panel seeks assurance that a training culture is embedded in the council.																

GOLD AWARD

TO ACHIEVE A GOLD AWARD A COUNCIL DEMONSTRATES THAT IT MEETS ALL REQUIREMENTS OF THE BRONZE AND SILVER AWARDS, AND IS AT THE FOREFRONT OF BEST PRACTICE BY ACHIEVING AN EXCELLENT STANDARD IN COMMUNITY GOVERNANCE, COMMUNITY LEADERSHIP AND PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT.

Before applying for the Gold award the council confirms by resolution that all the required documents, information and conditions are in place for the Gold award, and that these are published on the council's website, where applicable

To achieve the Gold award the council must publish on its website:

Governance	Community	Development
<i>Criteria demonstrating good governance in managing the business and finances of a council</i>	<i>Criteria representing a council's role in the community and how it engages with the community</i>	<i>Criteria representing council improvement through the management and development of staff and councillors</i>
A business plan covering a financial forecast for at least three years linked to revenue and capital plans for the council and its community	An annual report, online material, news bulletins and other council communications with evidence of: • Engaging with diverse groups in the community using a variety of methods • Community engagement influencing council activity and priorities • A wide range of council activities, including innovative projects, that produce positive outcomes for the community • Co-operating constructively with other organisations • Active promotion of elections, including that at least two-thirds of its councillors stood for election	

The following criteria require statements (of no more than one page) that should be presented to the accreditation panel showing how the council:

Governance	Community	Development
<i>Criteria demonstrating good governance in managing the business and finances of a council</i>	<i>Criteria representing a council's role in the community and how it engages with the community</i>	<i>Criteria representing council improvement through the management and development of staff and councillors</i>
Ensures that the council delivers value for money	Provides leadership in planning for the future of the community	Manages the performance of staff and the council as a corporate body to achieve its business plan
	Engages with the community on issues related to the environment and climate change	Supports a culture of civility and respect in the council

The council notifies the accreditation panel co-ordinator when the resolution has been agreed and provides a completed application form, including webpage addresses to where the information can be found online.

GOLD AWARD - WHAT IS THE ACCREDITATION PANEL LOOKING FOR?

The accreditation panel first checks that criteria for the Bronze and Silver Awards are in place if an award was assessed more than one year ago. It then considers the additional criteria for Gold. The exception to this is if the council received a Bronze or Silver award less than a year ago. Then the panel does not check the criteria for that award again, but the council still confirms in a public meeting that it meets these criteria.

The panel assesses the quality of documents and information in some depth. It seeks reassurance that the council is acting lawfully and aspires to excellence. In identifying excellence, the panel confirms that the council operates within the law as explained in standard works of reference, demonstrates transparent, efficient and effective decision-making and governance and exercises sound financial management.

The panel also seeks evidence of councillors and officers working together as a corporate body to achieve the criteria at Gold level. The panel will be interested to note whether the council already has a reputation for being at the forefront of best practice. The panel also seeks reassurance that the council is not experiencing destructive internal conflict or that nothing has occurred to bring the council into disrepute.

Complying with the guidance below, the panel confirms that up-to-date documentation and information for Gold is in place. The panel may ask for further information or talk to councillors and staff. Councils seeking the Gold Award should be aware that the panel is a peer group applying their own standards of excellence to the criteria explained below.

Criteria	Guidance
A business plan covering a financial forecast for at least three years linked to revenue and capital plans for the council and its community	The council works to a forward plan (or business plan) created for at least three years even if this takes the council beyond the next election. This plan explicitly responds to community engagement. It sets out the council's aims and objectives for both the council and the community and shows how they will be achieved including financial forecasts for both revenue and capital for the duration of the plan.
An annual report, online material, news bulletins and other council communications with evidence of: • Engaging with diverse groups in the community using a variety of methods • Community engagement influencing council activity and priorities • A wide range of council activities, including innovative projects, that produce positive outcomes for the community • Co-operating constructively with other organisations • Active promotion of elections, including that at least two-thirds of its councillors	The annual report, web material and news bulletins publicise the work and achievements of the council and contain substantial evidence that the council takes the lead in actively representing and serving all parts of its local community. The council therefore addresses the diversity of its community, including, for example, different age groups, service users, physical locations, housing types, language, employment status and skills. These sources of information also show that the council seeks out and responds to views and ideas expressed by its community. The council uses a variety of ways (at least four)

stood for election	of consulting and involving local people to understand their views. There should be evidence that the council identifies local needs and views through community engagement that are then addressed in constructive council action. These sources also show that the council promotes local democracy. The panel seeks evidence that community engagement is at the heart of determining council priorities. Evidence shows this engagement leads to actions and projects within the council that deliver positive outcomes for the community. The council is innovative; this is the case if the council undertakes actions that are still relatively new or unusual for that council. There is evidence that the council embraces new ideas and trying new projects. The panel also checks that the council is co-operating with other organisations, including community groups, its principal authority(ies) and other agencies to provide an effective service to the community. Co-operation includes but is not limited to partnerships. At the time of making the resolution, at least two-thirds of the seats on the council must be filled by councillors who stood for election at either the last ordinary elections or a by-election. This shows that the council represents the community through democratic processes. Councillors who stood for election, even if elected unopposed, do count, while councillors who were co-opted or appointed cannot count. If two thirds is not a whole number, then it must be rounded up to the next whole number using the table provided below
Total Council Seats	5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15 16 17 18 19 20
Two Thirds	4 4 5 6 6 7 8 8 9 10 10 11 12 12 13 14
Ensures that the council delivers value for money	The statement on ensuring value for money explains how the council reviews the quality and costs of its activities to confirm that the costs are appropriate. This could include, for example, the cost of the clerk's role in serving

	the council, the purchase of computer equipment or a grass cutting contract. It may also include reference to criteria from the other award levels as a number of these criteria do provide evidence that the council offers value for money. The statement will describe to the panel how the council understands and upholds its responsibilities over use of public money and showing due care and appropriate processes have been followed. The panel will look for evidence of sound financial management and transparency, including that the council has had two consecutive years of unqualified audits and it would be desirable if the council published its internal audit report on its website alongside the AGAR each year.
Provides leadership in planning for the future of the community	The statement on leadership in planning for the future shows how the council engages with a range of activities that influence the planning system and facilitate community-led planning. Activities may include, for example, identifying and representing community views on planning applications and local plans, working on parish or town plans, or holding community-led planning activities such as Planning for Real® or community conferences. The statement should include the council's approach to neighbourhood planning.
Engages with the community on issues related to the environment and climate change	The panel seeks evidence in this statement that the council has considered climate change and other environmental issues and has engaged with the community on these issues. The council will have considered how it can support or facilitate the community to take actions that could have a positive environmental impact for the local area, or more widely.
Manages the performance of staff and the council as a corporate body to achieve its business plan	The statement on performance management explains the processes by which the performance of the council as a corporate body is constantly improved and shows how the performance, skills and knowledge of each individual in the council is managed to help the council achieve its objectives on behalf of the community. The statement also includes confirming that each member of staff has their own professional development plan and that the majority of councillors

	participate in a member development programme that is specific to their roles and the needs of the council. It is important to show evidence that the council is a good employer.
Supports a culture of civility and respect in the council	The statement will provide the panel with a variety of ways in which the council actively supports a culture of civility and respect. This might include information from council meetings where commitment has been made to civil and respectful debate. It might include council policies, training for staff and councillors related to code of conduct, NOLAN principles and other relevant topics. The council might include information of where conflict in the council has been successfully managed and resolved. The statement might include supporting comments from staff, councillors, other partners

THE OUTCOME

When the panel is satisfied that it has seen sufficient information, the findings are presented in a report agreed by the panel. The panel makes one of three recommendations to the council:

- The Award is achieved.
- The Award is achieved but the council is advised to make some small changes.
- The Award is not achieved until specified improvements have been made.

If a council has applied for a higher award but has not achieved all the criteria, the panel can award a lower award if appropriate.

The aim of the scheme is to be supportive and help councils achieve the status they have applied for and so it is expected that achieving a lower (or no) award would be an exceptional circumstance. The panel will let the council know as soon as possible if it appears that they have omitted necessary evidence or it appears likely that they will not achieve the award, and the council will be given some time to respond to that feedback.

Once an award has been achieved NALC will issue a certificate and provide resources to help the council celebrate & promote its achievements. County Associations that carry out their own local panel assessments will present the certificate to the council themselves.

A list of currently awarded councils is published on the NALC website and is updated on a quarterly basis

Councils and accreditation panels may be contacted by NALC for feedback on the process and the benefits of receiving the awards.

A council may appeal to the IDB (with an additional fee of £100) if it feels that the panel's decision is unjustified. The IDB will appoint two representatives to review the appeal and the IDB's decision is final.

UPGRADING ACCREDITATION, RE-ACCREDITATION AND REMOVAL OF ACCREDITATION

Accreditation lasts for four years.

Applying for a higher award:

- If a council wishes to apply for a higher award, it makes a fresh registration and application.
- A council can make a fresh application for a higher award at any time. If this is within one year of the previously successful accreditation, the panel does not need to revisit evidence that was previously approved.

Re-accreditation:

- The council may seek re-accreditation at the same level after four years. If it does not achieve a new accreditation or re-accreditation before the four-year end-date, it loses its award.

Removal of accreditation:

- The council is expected to maintain its reputation by meeting the criteria throughout the four years.
- Although some circumstances may change, the council will not lose its award unless a significant event such as an audit, employment tribunal, court case or police investigation demonstrates the council's poor performance. In this case, a panel co-ordinator asks the IDB to appoint two representatives to review the situation. The IDB assesses the severity of the case before deciding whether to impose a sanction which may include the removal of all awards or returning the council to a lower award.
- The council can appeal to the IDB if the decision to remove an award is taken in which case two different IDB representatives review the case and their decision is final.

FEES

There are two fees:

- A registration fee paid to the National Association of Local Councils
- An accreditation fee paid to the organisation responsible for administering the local or regional accreditation process. This will either be NALC or the local county association.

The registration fee paid to NALC is £50 paid by all councils regardless of size and is payable upon registration.

The accreditation fee is payable once the council has received their result and varies according to:

- The award applied for
- The income of the council
- The council's accreditation history.

The accreditation fee covers the cost of the accreditation panel decision making process only. County Associations may charge additional costs for advice, training or support of applications.

	ANNUAL INCOME UNDER £25,000	ANNUAL INCOME OVER £25,000
Bronze	£50	£80
Silver	£80	£100
Gold	£100	£200

All figures quoted are excluding VAT.

The figures quoted are the discounted rates for members of NALC.

Both the registration fee and accreditation fees listed above are for local councils in membership of NALC and their local county association.

Non-member councils must pay a higher fee that is double the figure quoted above.

The fee is reduced by 20% if the council achieved accreditation at a lower level within the previous 12 months as the checking process covering criteria for the previous award requires less work.

EVALUATION AND IMPROVEMENT

The aim of the evaluation and improvement process is to allow councils to feel ownership of the scheme, and to see the scheme changing to meet the feedback and needs expressed by the sector. It should also allow the scheme to be dynamic and able to respond over time to changes in the sector, national policy and other relevant issues.

QUALITY ASSURANCE

Twice a year, representatives of the IDB will check at random a small sample of awards by carrying out spot checks of documents and information posted on a council's website.

The findings will not affect a council's award but will be used to improve the training for accreditation panels and to inform regular reviews of the scheme.

EVALUATION

At the end of each accreditation process the council and the panel will be sent a short evaluation questionnaire. This will aim to gather feedback on the process, the criteria, the resources provided by NALC and how they could be improved.

IMPROVEMENT

The feedback collected will be used to inform improvements to the scheme. The whole scheme, including the content and accreditation process, will be reviewed regularly.

The IDB will oversee all changes to the scheme.