



AGENDA ITEM: 6

**STANDARDS COMMITTEE:
7 APRIL 2009**

Report of: Council Secretary and Solicitor

Contact: Mrs G L Rowe (Ext 5004)/Mr G Martin (Ext 5065)
**(E-mail: gill.rowe@westlancsdc.gov.uk/
gary.martin@westlancsdc.gov.uk)**

SUBJECT: QUALITY PARISH COUNCILS

District wide interest

1.0 PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

1.1 To apprise the Standards Committee of the current position in West Lancashire on Parish Councils achieving 'Quality Parish Council' status (QPS).

2.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

2.1 That the number of Parish Councils in West Lancashire who have QPS be noted.

2.2 That the contents of the letter attached at Appendix 1 be noted.

3.0 BACKGROUND

3.1 At the meeting of the Committee held on 13 December 2008, I reported on the number of complaints received in the period from 8 May 2008 and members noted the high number of complaints relating to Parish Councils in the District, particularly Halsall. The Committee asked that I report on the current position in relation to Parishes in West Lancashire attaining QPS.

4.0 THE QUALITY PARISH COUNCIL SCHEME

4.1 The Quality Parish and Town Council Scheme was launched in 2003 following the Government's *Rural White Paper*, 2000. The aim of the Scheme is to provide benchmark minimum standards for parish and town councils. The Scheme is supported by six National Stakeholders, the Commission for Rural Communities, the Department for Communities and Local Government, the Department for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, the Local Government Association, the National Association of Local Councils and the Society of Local Council Clerks

4.2 The Quality scheme is open to all parish and town councils in England, irrespective of size. It aims to enable parish councils to work more closely with others in the delivery of local services and to better represent their local communities.

4.3 Parish Councils with QPS are expected to:

- be representative of and actively involve all parts of their community
- be effectively and properly managed, with members and officers upholding a high standard of conduct
- work closely with voluntary and community sector groups, and articulate the community's needs and wishes through effective communications, which might include the production of parish plans or other similar documents; and
- work in partnership with other local authorities and agencies and, depending on their size, be able to deliver local services which give the best deal for the local community
- QPS is attained when the Council, to the satisfaction of assessors, can demonstrate it meets a range of criteria including a requirement that at least two-thirds of the members of the Council must have been elected (this excludes co-opted or appointed members) and that the Parish Council's Clerk holds either a Certificate in Local Council Administration (CiLCA) a Certificate of Higher Education in Local Policy or Local Council Administration awarded by the University of Gloucestershire.

4.4 The accreditation process is managed by the County Association of the National Association of Local Councils on behalf of the National Stakeholders. Nationally, there are 8,500 Town and Parish Councils, with 681 of them having QPS. In West Lancashire 4 of the 20 Parish Councils (Bickerstaffe, Hesketh-with Beconsall, Newburgh and Parbold) have QPS.

4.5 The Parish and Town Charter recognises the potential benefits, in terms of the quality of service offered to local people, of Parish and Town Councils working towards and gaining, quality status. Efforts to achieve quality status are encouraged.

5.0 GOOD GOVERNANCE

5.1 I attach at Appendix 1 a copy of my letter to all Parish Councils dated 16 March 2009 explaining the importance of good governance documents in the context of the maintenance of high standards.

Background Documents

There are no background documents (as defined in Section 100D(5) of the Local Government Act 1972) to this Report.

Equality Impact Assessment

There is no evidence from an initial assessment of an adverse impact on equality in relation to the equality target groups.

Appendices:

Appendix 1 – Letter to Parish Councils – 16.3.09