# QUALITY PARISH & TOWN COUNCIL SCHEME

# Quality council scheme review

*Consultation results and analysis*

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## Consultation results and analysis

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## Online survey - consultation methodology and respondent profiles

How many responses were there?
The survey link was publicised as widely as possible to all stakeholders to the quality town and parish council scheme. It was sent by email to town and parish councils via county associations and the society of local council clerks (SLCC). It was also publicised on the national association of local councils (NALC) and SLCC websites and was publicised to principal councils via the local government association (LGA). Copies of the survey in paper, or by email in pdf format, were available from the NALC administration team.

Because the survey was open access the number of people who were given the opportunity to complete it is not precisely known. It is therefore not possible to ascertain the specific response or cooperation rate for this essay.

Survey monkey guidelines for response rates, however, state that for any population size between 10,000 and 10,000,000 a response rate of between 400 and 1,100 puts the results within a margin of error between ±3% and ±5%[1].

1,727 people accessed and completed the first page of the survey asking them who they were. 1,331 completed the next section of the survey, which asked for their views on the scheme in general, which is 77% of those who began it. 1,054 completed the entire survey, which consisted of 3 further sections, which is 61% of those who began the survey and 79% of those who completed section 2.

24 paper or emailed pdf copies of the survey were sent out to those who requested them, of which 5 were returned, which is a 21% completion rate.

Overall 1059 people completed the entire survey either online or in paper format with some people completing only certain sections.

Analysis
- The response rate to the consultation puts the results within a margin of error between ±3% and ±5%.
- 61% of those who began the online survey completed it, compared with 21% of those who requested a paper or pdf survey, suggesting that the online format boosted completion rates overall.

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[1] http://help.surveymonkey.com/articles/en_US/kb/How-many-respondents-do-I-need

# Who responded to the consultation?

**Are you (Please choose the option that best describes your role. If you have more than one role please choose the option in which you have had most experience of the Quality Parish and Town Council Scheme):**



- local council staff
- local councillor
- county association staff
- other
- county accreditation panel member
- resident
- county association executive member
- district or borough councillor
- unitary authority councillor
- unitary authority officer
- county council officer
- district or borough council officer
- county councillor

31.2 % (541)
2.1 % (37)
2.1 % (37)
2.1 % (36)
0.7 % (12)
0.7 % (12)
0.5 % (9)
0.3 % (5)
0.2 % (4)
0.2 % (3)
0.1 % (2)
59.7 % (1034)
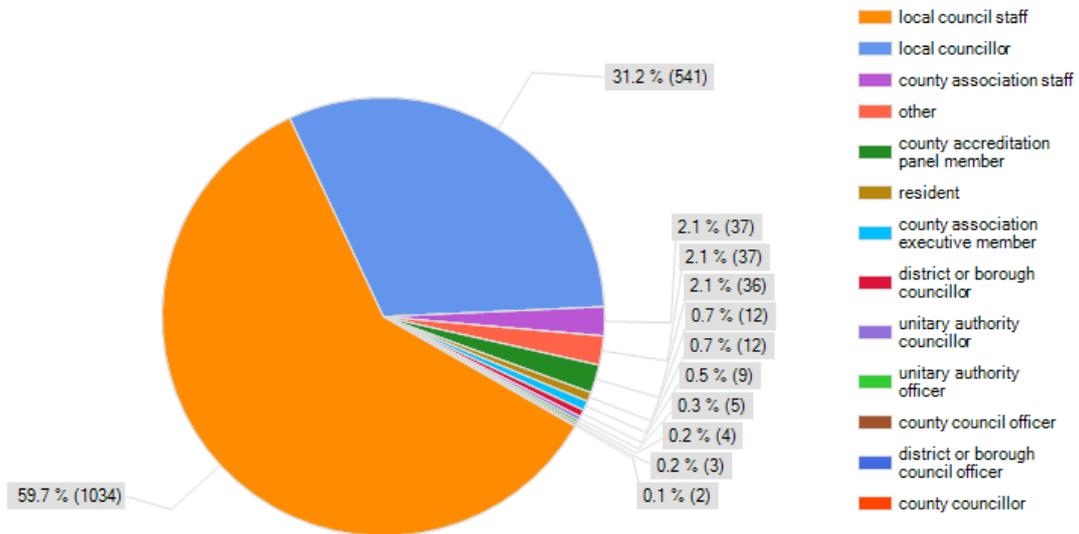
**Are you completing this survey:**



- As an individual?
- On behalf of your council or county association?

34.4 % (595)
65.6 % (1137)
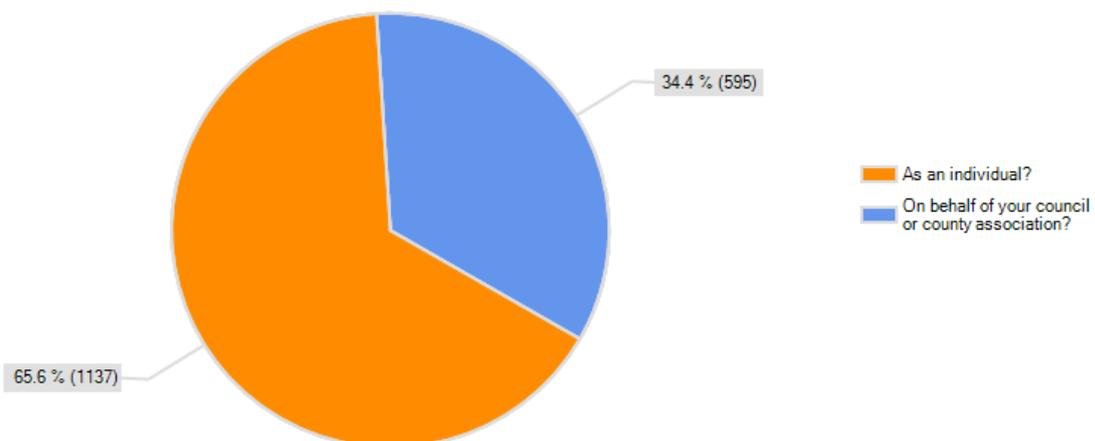
**Does your council currently hold Quality Status?**



- No — 60.4 % (686)
- Yes — 35.9 % (408)
- I don't know — 3.6 % (41)
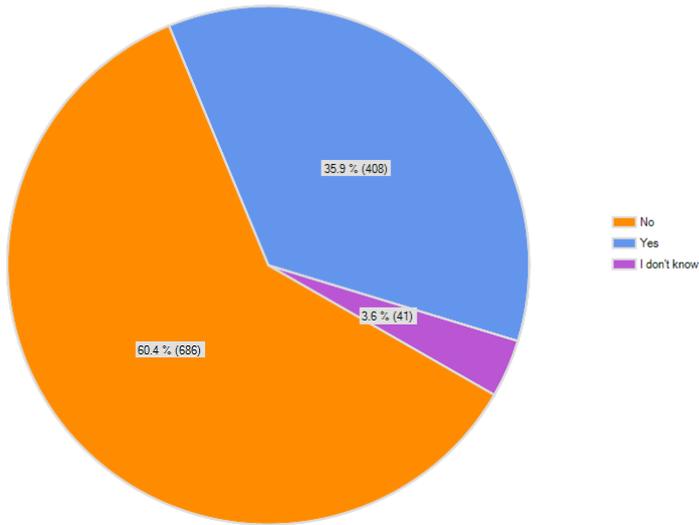
## Demographics

At the end of the survey respondents were asked a range of optional anonymous questions in order to give a picture of the demographic spread of those responding to the consultation. DEFRA statistical analysis (full details of which can be seen in the supporting spreadsheet "DEFRA statistical correlations") concluded that specific responses to the survey questions were linked to the respondents' role within the scheme and whether or not they were from a council with quality status, rather than their demographic characteristics.

**What is your gender?**



- Male — 44.0 %
- Female — 53.6 %
- Prefer not to say — 2.4 %
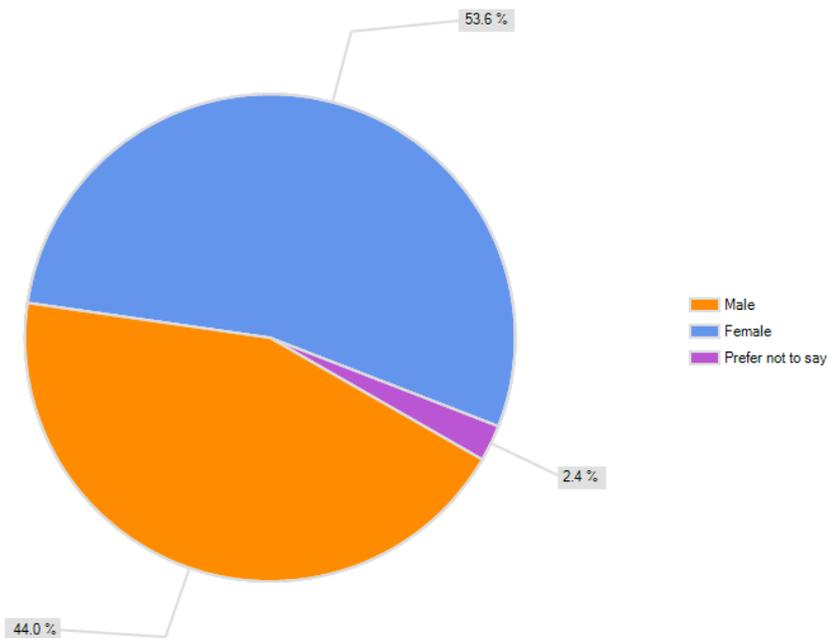
## Do you consider yourself to have a disabilty ?

**92.4 %**

Legend:
- Yes
- No
- Prefer not to say

**2.7 %**
**4.9 %**

## What is your age?

**41.2 %**

Legend:
- 19 and under
- 20-29
- 30-39
- 40-49
- 50-59
- 60 and over
- Prefer not to say

**31.7 %**
**4.9 %**
**0.6 %**
**4.1 %**
**17.6 %**
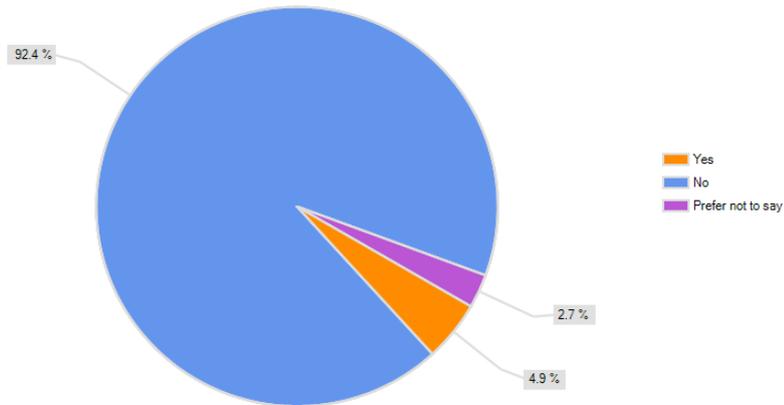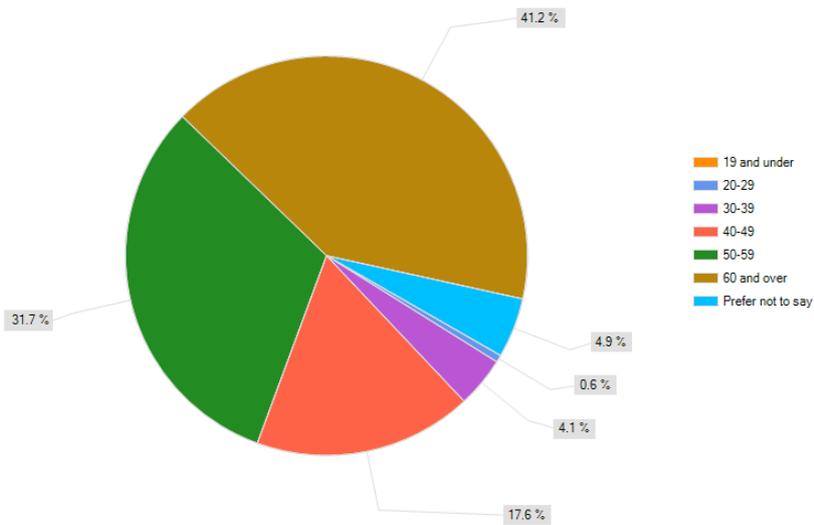
## What is your ethnic background?

**1.1%**  **2.0%**  **0.8%**  **6.2%**  **0.4%**
**0.8%**  **0.3%**
**0.5%**

Legend:
- Asian, or Asian British
- Black, or Black British
- White British
- White Irish
- White Scottish
- White Welsh
- White - other
- Mixed Heritage, or other ethnic background
- Prefer not to say

**88.1%**
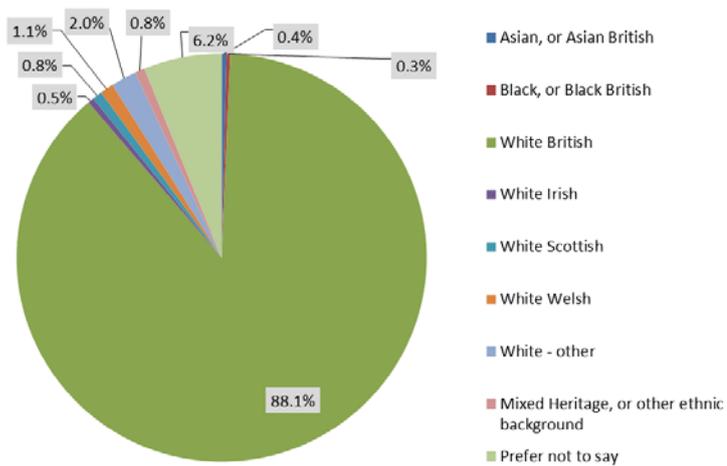
**Which county are you from?**

| County | Number of respondents | Percentage response |
|---|---|---|
| Avon | 13 | 1.2% |
| Bedfordshire | 20 | 1.9% |
| Berkshire | 23 | 2.2% |
| Buckinghamshire | 23 | 2.2% |
| Cambridgeshire | 19 | 1.8% |
| Cheshire | 17 | 1.6% |
| Cleveland | 3 | 0.3% |
| Cornwall | 10 | 0.9% |
| County Durham | 19 | 1.8% |
| Cumbria | 38 | 3.6% |
| Derbyshire | 10 | 0.9% |
| Devon | 31 | 2.9% |
| Dorset | 12 | 1.1% |
| East & West Sussex | 39 | 3.7% |
| Essex | 39 | 3.7% |
| Gloucestershire | 28 | 2.6% |
| Hampshire | 28 | 2.6% |
| Herefordshire | 8 | 0.8% |
| Hertfordshire | 14 | 1.3% |
| Isle Of Wight | 12 | 1.1% |
| Kent | 45 | 4.2% |
| Lancashire | 20 | 1.9% |
| Leicestershire and Rutland | 23 | 2.2% |
| East Riding of Yorkshire and North Lincolnshire | 8 | 0.8% |
| Lincolnshire | 43 | 4.1% |
| Merseyside | 4 | 0.4% |
| Norfolk | 17 | 1.6% |
| Yorkshire | 57 | 5.4% |
| Northamptonshire | 23 | 2.2% |
| Nottinghamshire | 10 | 0.9% |
| Northumberland | 7 | 0.7% |
| Oxfordshire | 11 | 1.0% |
| Shropshire | 36 | 3.4% |
| Somerset | 36 | 3.4% |
| Staffordshire | 11 | 1.0% |
| Suffolk | 14 | 1.3% |
| Surrey | 13 | 1.2% |
| Wales | 9 | 0.8% |
| Warwickshire & West Midlands | 14 | 1.3% |
| Wiltshire | 31 | 2.9% |
| Worcestershire | 9 | 0.8% |
| No answer | 212 | 20.0% |
| **Total** | **1059** | |

**Analysis**

- No reliable demographic data is available for the local council sector as a whole, and so the demographic data collected has been compared with demographic data for the population of England as a whole.[2]
- It is therefore not possible to analyse the demographic data of those who completed the survey to consider whether or not particular demographic groups are over or under-represented among the respondents, when compared to the total number of people who could have responded.
- The following comparisons with the population as whole are therefore given as a benchmark, rather than as evidence of any potential exclusion.
- The proportion of men and women completing the survey is consistent with the proportion of men and women in the population as a whole.
- The proportion of respondents from a white ethnic background was significantly higher than that in the population as a whole; only 1.5% of respondents were from a mixed, black, Asian or other minority ethnic background.
- 72.9% of respondents to the survey were over the age of 50 and only 4.7% were younger than 40.
- The proportion of respondents who consider that they have a disability (4.9%) is below the national average (18%).
- The overall geographical spread of respondents is wide, with respondents from all county areas.
- Those counties which have a particularly low level of respondents (less than 5) share a county association with a county which has a larger number of respondents.
- Over 200 respondents did not give any information about which county they were from.

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[2] General demographic data take from the 2011 census conducted by the Office for National Statistics: http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/rel/census/2011-census/key-statistics-for-local-authorities-in-england-and-wales/stb-2011-census-key-statistics-for-england-and-wales.html and the Office for Disability Issues: http://odi.dwp.gov.uk/disability-statistics-and-research/disability-facts-and-figures.php

## Perception of the scheme as a whole

The full data which supports this section is available in the spreadsheet "Questions 1-3 experience of the scheme".

The complete answers to the following questions are available on the accompanying data sheet, broken down by type of respondent. Given that the estimated margin of error is between ±3% and ±5% I have highlighted significant variations from the overall response of more than 5% for identified respondent groups.

Statistical analysis showed that the most important factors affecting response were whether a respondent was from a county association, a local councillor or local council staff, and if one of the latter two, whether or not the respondent was from a council that held quality status. Because of this, and because most other respondent groups had a very small sample size this report focuses primarily on looking at the differences in response between these groups.

**Do you support the principle of the quality parish and town council scheme as a national standards scheme for local (town, parish and community) councils?**

82% of respondents answered "Yes" to this question with 8.5% answering "No" and 9.4% "I don't know".

When broken down by type of respondent the only significant variations from this were:
- Respondents from county associations, 100% of whom answered "Yes".
- Respondents from local councils (staff and councillors) with quality status, 92.1% of whom answered "Yes", 5.2% answered "No" and 2.7% answered "I don't know"
- Respondents from local councils (staff and councillors) without Quality Status 76.1% of whom answered "Yes", 11.3% answered "No" and 12.6% answered "I don't know"

**Does the quality parish and town council scheme help to raise standards within the local council sector?**

66.9% of respondents answered "Yes" to this question with 13.3% answering "No" and "19.8%" I don't know.

There was more variation for this question when broken down by type of respondent:
- County accreditation panel members were most positive, with 97.2% answering "Yes", along with county association staff, 78.8% of whom answered "Yes".
- 81.4% of respondents from local councils (staff and councillors) with quality status answered "Yes", 10.5% answered "No" and 8.1% answered "I don't know".
- 59.3% of respondents from local councils (staff and councillors) without quality status answered "Yes", 14.9% answered "No" and 25.8% answered "I don't know".

**Does the quality parish and town council scheme help to encourage best practice within the local council sector?**

Overall 72.1% of respondents answered "Yes" to this question, with 12.3% answering "No" and 15.6% answering "I don't know".

There were several significant variations for answers to this question when broken down by respondent:

- County accreditation panel members were more positive than average, with 94.3% answering "Yes" and 2.9% answering "No" and "I don't know" respectively, as were county association executive members with 81.8% answering "Yes", and 9.1% answering both "No" and "I don't know" respectively.
- The response from county association staff was less unequivocally positive, with 25% answering "No", although the proportion of those who answered "Yes" was within the average range.
- 84.3% of respondents from local councils (staff and councillors) with Quality Status answered "Yes", 9.2% answered "No" and 6.5% answered "I don't know".
- 65.7% of respondents from local councils (staff and councillors) without Quality Status answered "Yes", 14.1% answered "No" and 20.2% answered "I don't know".

**Respondent groups with small sample sizes**
Although a majority of all respondents supported the principle of the scheme,  principal authority officers, councillors and residents were less positive than average, or were more likely to answer "I don't know", when asked if the scheme raised standards or promoted best practice.

**Analysis**
- A significant majority of respondents support the principle of the quality town and parish council scheme.
- A majority of respondents agree that the scheme raises standards in the sector.
- A majority of respondents agree that the scheme promotes best practice.
- Respondents from county accreditation panels and county association executive members are the most positive about the scheme and its role in raising standards.
- A significant minority of county association staff do not think, or are unsure, that the scheme raises standards and promotes best practice.
- Respondents from quality councils are more positive about the scheme than those from councils without quality status, but the majority of respondents from councils without quality status still support the scheme and think that it raises standards and promotes best practice.
- Although the small sample size of respondents from principal councils and residents means that firm conclusions cannot be drawn from their answers, the fact that there were less sure of the benefits of the scheme may indicate that there is more to be done in promoting the scheme to stakeholders outside of the local council sector.

## Why do councils apply, or not apply, for quality status?

### Deciding to apply for quality status

**Why did your council apply for Quality Status? Please tick all that apply:**
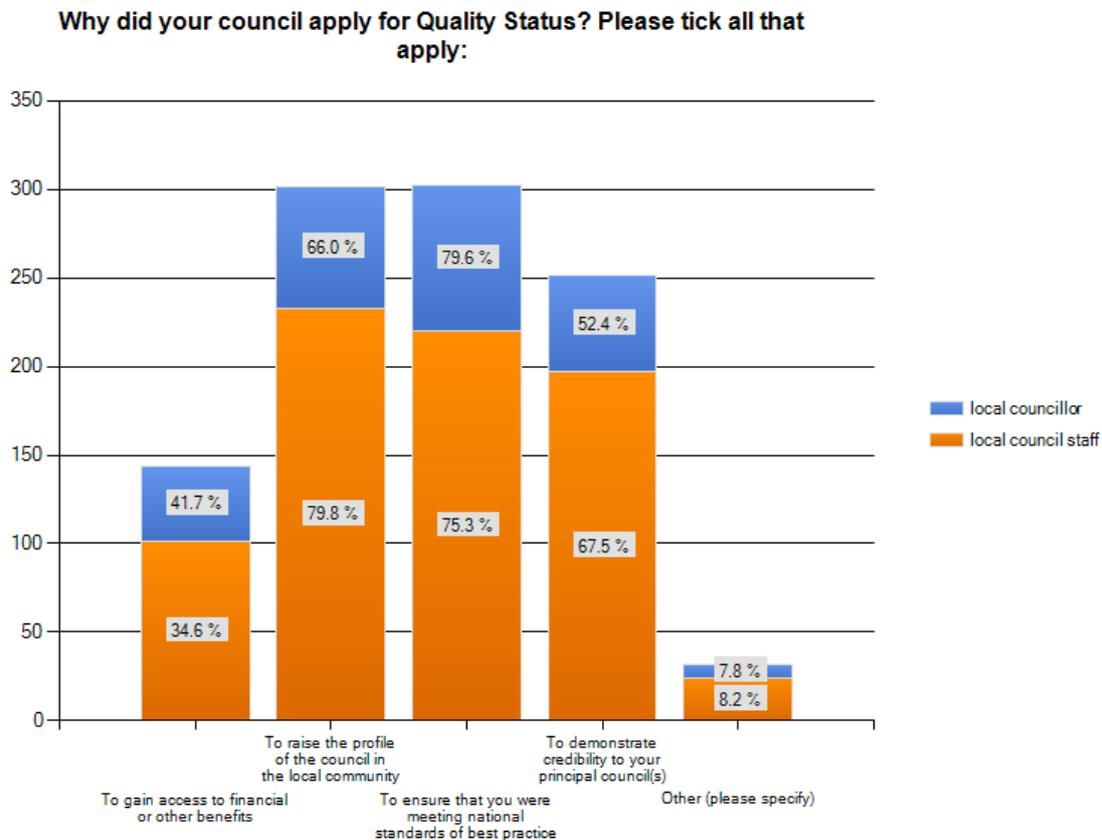


### Analysis

- The most common motivations are the desire to raise the profile of their council within the community and to check that they meet nationally agreed standards.
- Demonstrating credibility to a principal council is also an important motivation – this was highlighted in some comments, which mentioned service devolution as a motivation.
- A majority of councils did not see gaining access to benefits, financial or otherwise as the principal motivation for seeking quality status.

### Experience of the quality town and parish council scheme

Quality councils were asked to rate their agreement on a 1-5 scale with a number of statements about their experience of the quality town and parish council scheme.
The full data supporting this section can be found in the spreadsheet "QC – perceived value of scheme"

The majority of respondents felt that their expectations about achieving quality status had been met, although when this was broken down by role, almost two-thirds of local council staff were unsure or did not feel that their expectations had been met.

Although the majority of respondents felt that the scheme was an important measure of how the council was performing, there was no consensus around the question of whether the performance measures were accurate.

A majority of respondents agreed that gaining quality status was a worthwhile investment of time and money, although a significant minority (47.7%) were either unsure, or disagreed with this statement.

Overall, the majority of respondents were either unsure, or did not feel that gaining quality status had brought any benefits for their council.

As well as analysing these results by individual statement they were also analysed as a whole by DEFRA statisticians to give an indication of respondents' overall perception of the scheme (the full DEFRA analyses referred to here and in the rest of this report can be found in the spreadsheet "DEFRA general analysis"). These were broadly positive, although local councillors had significantly higher scores on this overall perception scale compared to local council staff. There was also a correlation between having a positive perception of the scheme overall and giving a high rating to the support available to councils looking to achieve accreditation.

**Analysis**
- Overall, most respondents from quality councils feel positive about having achieving accreditation and feel that it is an important measure of council performance.
- There is, however, is a lack of consensus around how accurately the current scheme reflects council performance.
- Local council staff are less likely to perceive the scheme in a positive light than local councillors and are considerably less likely to perceive that there have been any tangible benefits to the council as a result of accreditation.
- A worryingly high number of quality councils are either unsure if, or do not believe that, gaining quality status is a worthwhile investment of time and money.

## Deciding not to apply for quality status

We also asked respondents from councils who did not hold quality status about their reasons for not seeking accreditation. We broke these respondents down into two groups: the first group contained respondents from councils who had previously held quality status but had not subsequently sought reaccreditation:



**Why did your council not apply for reaccreditation as a Quality Council? (please tick all that apply):**
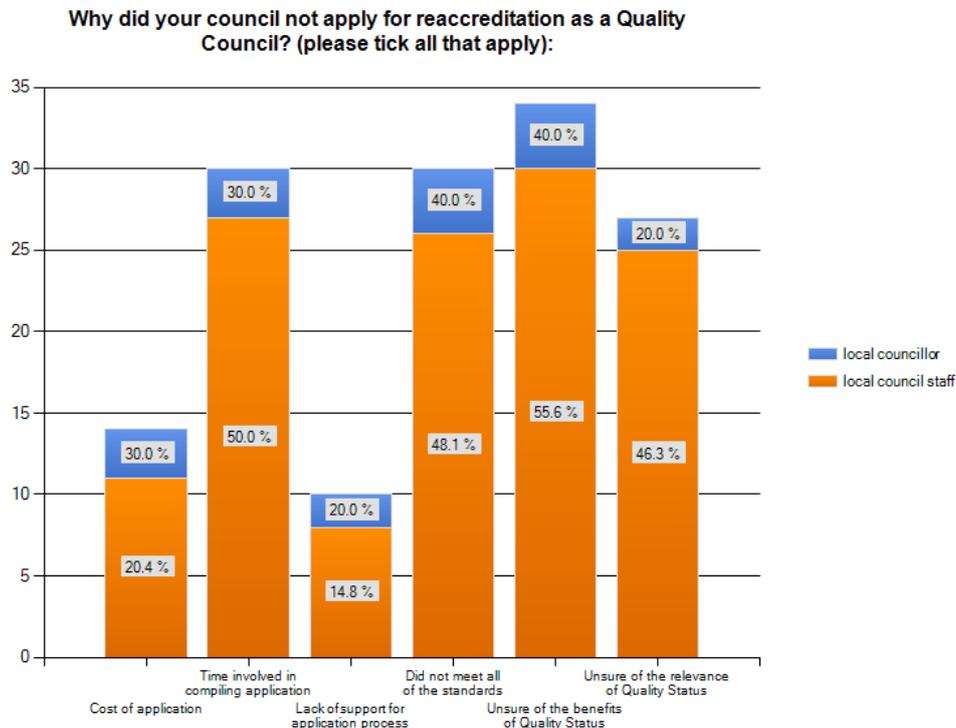
The second group contained respondents from council who had never held quality status:



**Why did your council not apply for Quality Status? (please tick all that apply)**
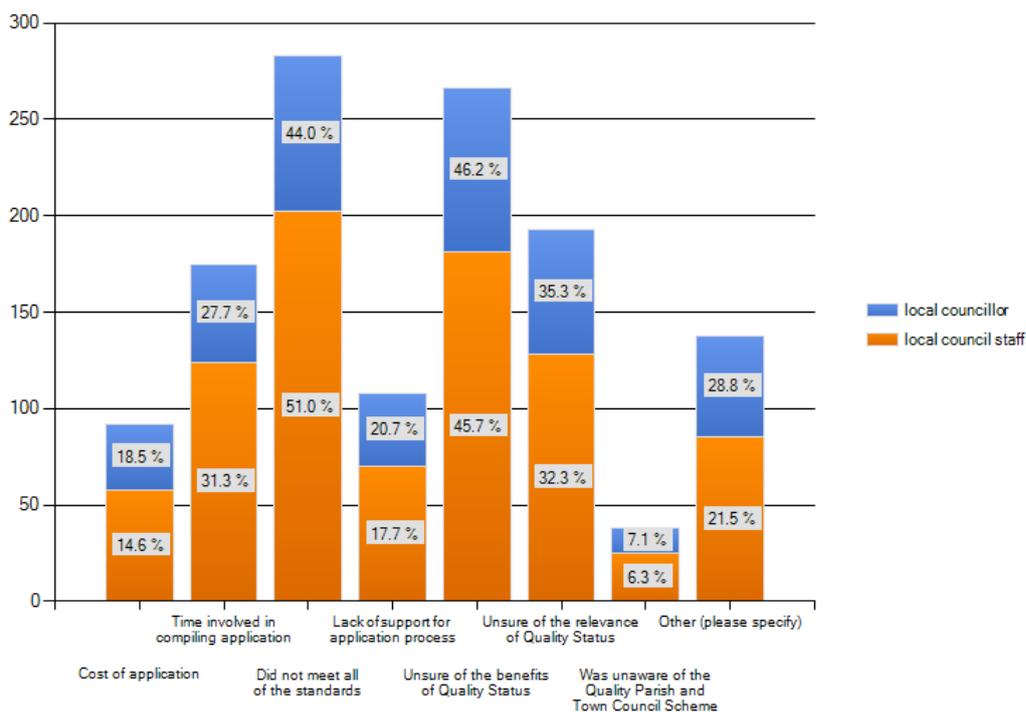
**Analysis**

- There are many similarities between the reasons that councils do not reaccredit and the reasons councils don't accredit in the first place.
- The cost of the application and a lack of support for the application process are not the most significant deterrents to application.
- In common with councils who have quality status, councils without it are unsure of the relevance and benefits of accreditation to their councils and communities, and this is a key barrier to accreditation and especially reaccreditation.
- Not meeting the standards remains a key barrier – with the electoral mandate and qualified clerk mentioned by those who ticked "other" and then specified their reasons in the comments as the most frequent areas in which a council falls short.
- The time taken to complete the application is seen as a key barrier – many of the comments highlighted that it was too bureaucratic.
- Fewer than 10% of respondents were completely unaware of the scheme.

**Support for councils seeking quality status**

The full data supporting this section can be found in the spreadsheet "Perception of support for gaining QS – local councils".

**Local council staff and councillors - awareness and rating of current support**
54.4% of respondents were unaware of any support that was available for councils looking to gain quality status. When broken down by role, local councillors were less likely to be aware of the support (63.8% said they were unaware of any available support) than local council staff (50.1% said they were unaware of any available support).

59.2% of respondents from councils without quality status and 84.2% of respondents who did not know whether or not their council had quality status, were unaware of any support which was available, as opposed to the 50.8% of respondents from councils with quality status who were aware of the support.

Of those respondents who gave further details of support which was available the vast majority mentioned their county association. Most did not, however, give any details of what this support entailed. A smaller number mentioned help or publications available from SLCC and NALC.

Respondents were also asked to rate the level of support available to help councils achieve quality status, on 1-5 scale where 1 = poor and 5 = excellent. Overall just over half (53.6%) of respondents rated the support available as "acceptable", "good" or "excellent", meaning that 46.4% rated the support as "poor" or "average".

When these ratings are broken down by whether or not respondents had previously indicated that they were aware of the support available, however, 77.7% of those who were previously aware of the support available rated that support it as "acceptable" or higher, with 46.5% rating it as "good" or "excellent". By contrast, nearly 73% of those who had not previously been aware of the support available rated the support level as either "poor" or "average".

In addition, DEFRA analysis concluded that there was a link between a respondent being from a council with quality status and giving a positive rating to the level of support available, with 62.2% of respondents from councils with quality status rating the support as "acceptable" or above. This is addition to the positive correlation between giving a high rating to the level of support, and having a positive perception of the scheme, as noted above.

There was no significant difference in rating the support available when broken down by role (local council staff or local councillor).

**Analysis**
- A worryingly high percentage of respondents were unaware of the support available to councils looking to achieve quality status, even within councils which had already achieved it.
- Although the overall rating of the level of support is poor, this is clearly influenced by the large number of respondents who were unaware any support existed.

- Those respondents who were aware of the support available generally rated it highly, particularly if their council had achieved quality status, although they did not provide much detail about what kind of support they had received.

## Local council staff and councillors – views on possible future support

**Which of the following types of support do you think would be most helpful to councils seeking to achieve Quality Status in future? Please choose up to 2 options:**
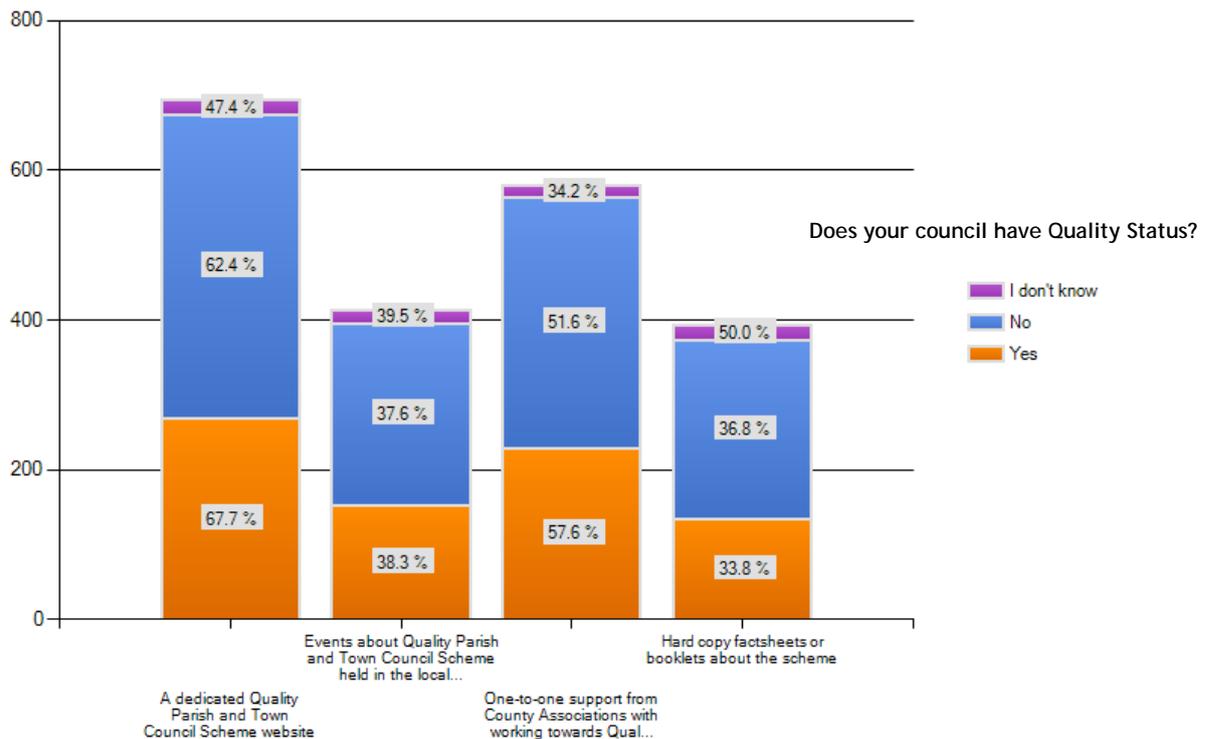


In addition to these predetermined options, respondents were asked for other suggestions as to the type of support which might be of use, or which were being provided and had been useful, including:

- More opportunities for networking, mentoring and peer advice and support between councils seeking quality status and councils with quality status.
- Enthusiasm for the scheme from principal councils, as well as some encouragement from them to become accredited.
- An opportunity to request an "audit" of the accreditation portfolio prior to submission to the county accreditation panel.
- Examples of good practice around the quality council criteria, model documentation and a clear step-by-step guide to achieving quality status.
- Better promotion of the scheme, its purpose and advantages.
- Financial support from central government for the training and improvement work necessary for small councils to achieve quality status.
- Support and advice by phone or email when compiling the portfolio, possibly from a dedicated quality parish liaison officer at county level.

## Local council staff and councillors - willingness to pay for support

**How much would your council be prepared to pay to send a representative to an event in your local area which provided information and support in completing a Quality Parish and Town Council Scheme submission?**
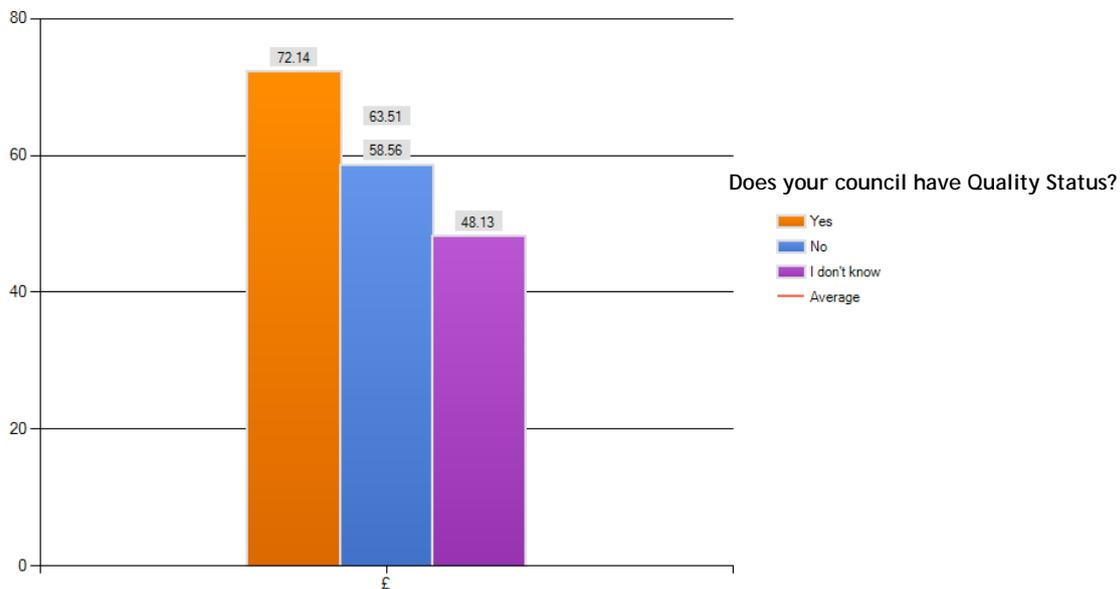


On average, respondents said that their council would be willing to pay approximately £63 to send someone to attend an event in the local area which provided information and support in completing a quality parish and town council scheme submission.

**How much would your council be prepared to pay for dedicated one-to-one support with completing a Quality Parish and Town Council Scheme submission?**
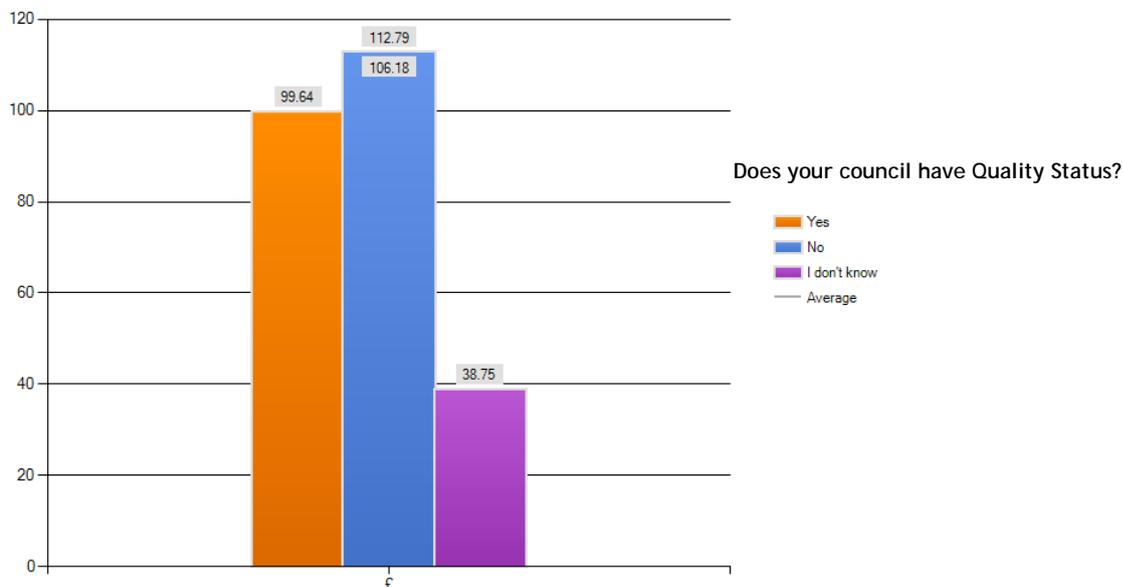


On average, respondents said that their council would be willing to pay approximately £106 for dedicated one-to-one support with completing a quality parish and town council scheme submission.

Because some respondents said they would not be prepared to pay anything for support, which has an effect on the average as calculated above, it is also useful to look in more

detail at how many respondents were willing to pay something for support, the most common amounts that they mentioned and the range of those amounts:

| How much would your council be prepared to pay to send a representative to an event in your local area which provided information and support in completing a Quality Parish and Town Council Scheme submission? | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Amount | No of responses | % of overall responses | % who will pay | |
| Nothing | 167 | 21.5% | 78.5% | |
| Less than £50 | 162 | 20.8% | | |
| 50 exactly | 182 | 23.4% | | |
| £51 - £100 | 196 | 25.2% | | |
| More than £100 | 70 | 9.0% | | |
| | 777 | | | |

| How much would your council be prepared to pay for dedicated one-to-one support with completing a Quality Parish and Town Council Scheme submission? | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Amount | No of responses | % of overall responses | % who will pay | |
| Nothing | 259 | 35.6% | 64.4% | |
| £50 or less | 153 | 21.0% | | |
| £51 - £100 | 163 | 22.4% | | |
| £101 - 200 | 74 | 10.2% | | |
| More than £200 | 79 | 10.9% | | |
| | 728 | | | |

On average local council staff thought that their council would be willing to spend more on an event than local councillors, who though that their council would be willing to spend more for one-to-one support.

Respondents from councils with quality status thought that their council would be willing to spend slightly more on an event than respondents from councils without quality status who thought that their council would be willing to spend slightly more on one-to-one support.

**Analysis**
- There was considerable support for all of the four suggested support mechanisms, but the most popular were a dedicated QPS website and one-to-one support from county associations.
- There were a number of other suggestions for avenues of support which might be useful, some central and some at county level.
- The majority of respondents said that their council would be willing to pay for some kind of support with completing a quality council submission.
- There is a significant difference in the amount that different councils might be prepared to pay for such support.
- Breaking the responses to these questions down by role and quality status does not reveal that any one group is less likely to access or pay for support but does emphasise that different types of support may be seen as more useful by different types of respondent.

**County associations - rating of support currently available**
The full data which supports this section is available in the spreadsheet "perception of support in gaining QS – county associations"

Respondents were also asked to rate the level of support available to help councils achieve quality status, on 1-5 scale where 1 = poor and 5 = excellent. Overall 79.7% of respondents rated the support available as "acceptable" or higher, with 58.1% rating it as "good" or "excellent". When broken down by role, county association staff were more likely to rate the support available less highly – 28% of them rated them rated the available support as "poor" or "average" as opposed to the 16% of county accreditation panel members and 10% of county association executive members who chose these ratings.

**County associations - types of support currently available**

Respondents were asked for details of the types of support currently available in their county to councils seeking quality status. Respondents gave details of a range of different types and levels of support currently available, including:

- **One-to-one support, mentoring and advice with compiling a portfolio.**
  In some counties this is available via a parish liaison officer funded by the principal authority. In others it is available for free for member councils and at a cost to non-members.

- **Gap analysis; action plan development; pre-application audit**
  In addition many counties offered some or all of the above as part of their one-to-one support package free or at a cost depending on resources, as above.

- **Events and training**
  Some counties hold a yearly quality council event to encourage applications; others hold regular information events and training; some mainstream encouragement to apply for quality status throughout other training opportunities

- **Council visits**
  In some counties the county officer visits interested councils to offer a quality status briefing or help with compiling the portfolio

- **Quality champions**
  One county gave details of an initiative to designate 2 county executive members as quality council champions, who are then charged with visiting councils to explain and promote quality status.

## County associations – views on possible future support



**Which of the following types of support do you think would be most helpful to councils seeking to achieve Quality Status in future? Please choose up to 2 options:**

- A dedicated Quality Parish and Town Council Scheme website: county association staff 54.8%, county accreditation panel member 38.2%, county association executive member 60.0%
- Events about Quality Parish and Town Council Scheme held in the local...: county association staff 32.3%, county accreditation panel member 29.4%, county association executive member 30.0%
- One-to-one support from County Associations with working towards Qual...: county association staff 64.5%, county accreditation panel member 85.3%, county association executive member 80.0%
- Hard copy factsheets or booklets about the scheme: county association staff 58.1%, county accreditation panel member 41.2%, county association executive member 20.0%

In addition to these predetermined options, respondents were asked for other suggestions as to the type of support which might be of use in the future:

- Opportunities for networking, mentoring and peer advice and support between councils seeking quality status and councils with quality status.

- Better promotion of the scheme, its purpose and advantages, along with an increase in real advantages/benefits.

- An e-learning package to support councils in how to compile a submission.

- Quality council champions appointed from county association executive.

- Case studies of good practice around the quality council criteria and model documentation/template submissions.

- Some indication of the importance of the scheme to other tiers of government.

## County associations - charging for support to achieve quality status

**Would your County Association or County Training Partnership be able to provide additional support for councils seeking Quality Status if it were possible to charge for it?**



Legend:
- county association executive member
- county accreditation panel member
- county association staff

Yes: 90.0 %, 63.6 %, 71.0 %
No: 9.7 %
I don't know: 10.0 %, 36.4 %, 19.4 %
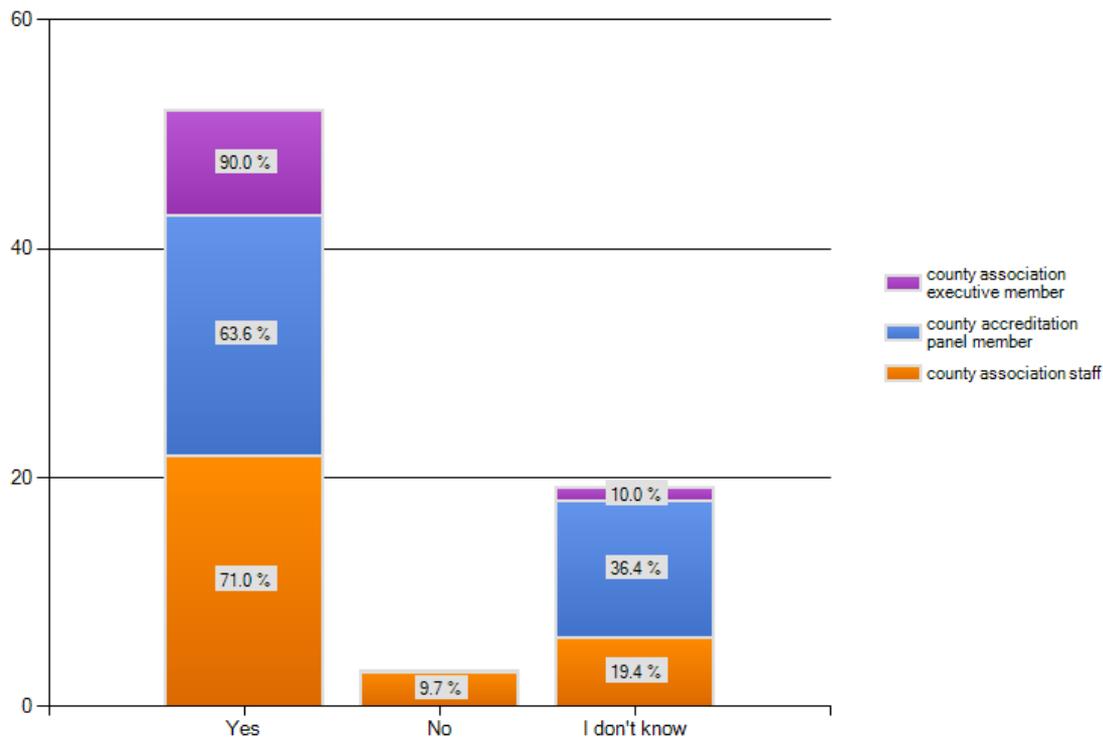
## Analysis

- There is a wide variation in the type and level of support available from county to county, with some counties able to offer a very hands-on, well-resourced support, and others struggling to offer any.
- The rating given by respondents from county associations to the level of support offered to councils seeking quality status is in line with the rating from respondents from local councils who were aware of the support on offer.
- Promoting the tangible benefits of quality status and the relevance of the scheme to other tiers of government are perceived as being important factors in supporting councils to achieve quality status.
- The majority of county associations believe they could provide additional support for councils seeking quality status if they could charge for it.

## Principal authorities – support for the scheme

Approximately 20 responses were received from officers and councillors at principal authority level so from a statistical perspective there is a lack of validity due to the small sample size. It is possible to pick out some relevant themes from these answers, however, which correspond with the answers given by respondents from local councils and county associations, as follows

- There is a range in the level of participation and support from principal authorities across the country, with the majority not supporting the scheme in any way.

- Where principal authorities do provide support the following methods have been reported:
    ◦ providing funding for a QPS liaison officer at county level
    ◦ promoting QPS through events or other engagement
    ◦ providing a representative to the county accreditation panel
- The focus of the current scheme on process rather than service delivery is potentially a barrier to principal authority involvement

## Submitting a portfolio and scheme administration

### Quality councils - compiling the accreditation submission

The full data supporting this section is available in the spreadsheet "QC portfolio submission data".



Approximately how long, in hours, did it take to compile your application for accreditation?
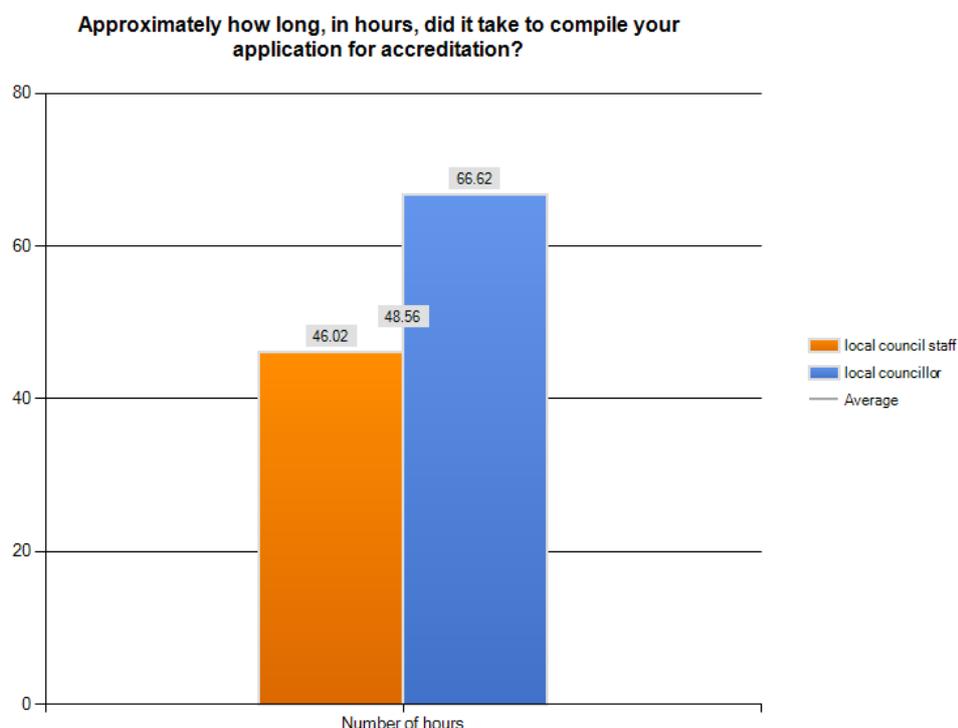
We asked respondents from quality councils how many hours it had taken them to compile their application for quality status. The average (mean) number of hours was approximately 48.5 (between 6 and 7 working days). Local councillors said that compiling the application took on average 20 more hours than the average reported by local council staff.

There was a lot of variation in the time-scales reported for compiling an accreditation submission – 0-300 hours by local council staff and 0-500 hours by local councillors. A range this wide may have a distorting effect on calculating the average as a mean and so it is also useful to look at the distribution of responses within this range:

| Approximately how long, in hours, did it take to compile your application for accreditation? | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Time | No of responses - staff | % of staff responses | No of responses - cllrs | % of cllr responses | Total responses | Total % |
| under 24 hours | 62 | 25.6% | 14 | 41.2% | 76 | 27.5% |
| 25 - 32 hours | 51 | 21.1% | 3 | 8.8% | 54 | 19.6% |
| 33 - 50 hours | 78 | 32.2% | 9 | 26.5% | 87 | 31.5% |
| 51 - 100 hours | 36 | 14.9% | 2 | 5.9% | 38 | 13.8% |
| more than 100 hours | 15 | 6.2% | 6 | 17.6% | 21 | 7.6% |
| Total | 242 | | 34 | | 276 | |

This table shows that approximately 80% of respondents reported that the submission took 50 hours or less to complete, which tallies with the average when calculated as a mean. It also shows, however, that the larger range of timescales reported by local councillors does have a distorting effect on the average when calculated as a mean. In fact, local

councillors were significantly more likely to report a lower timescale than local council staff with the largest proportion of them (41.2%) reporting that the submission took less than 24 hours to compile. Responses from local council staff were more evenly spread with the largest proportion (32.2%) saying that the submission took 33 – 50 hours to complete (between 4 and 7 full-time working weeks).

**Analysis**

- There is a wide variation between councils in the amount of time it takes to compile a submission for accreditation as a quality council.
- Qualitative evidence taken from elsewhere in the survey and the structured interviews suggested that councils who seek quality status to validate what they are already doing find a submission takes less time to compile than those who have to implement new initiatives in order to meet the standards.
- There is a significant difference in the responses when broken down by role, with more variation in the responses given by local councillors.
- Qualitative evidence elsewhere in the survey suggests that in general local council staff do the majority of the work in compiling accreditation submissions. Their responses to this question may therefore be more accurate than those of local councillors.
- It is evident from these responses that for many councils compiling the submission for quality status takes a significant investment of staff time. It seems relevant to highlight here that earlier in the survey 51% of local council staff from councils who had previously held quality status named the time taken to complete the submission as a reason why their council had not chosen to reaccredit, compared to only 31.3% of similar respondents from councils who had never applied for quality status. It seems that not only is the perception of the amount of work required a barrier to application but the experience of the amount of work required is an even greater barrier.

## Quality councils - receiving notification of accreditation

**Approximately how long, in weeks, did it take from submitting your application for accreditation to receiving notification of accreditation?**
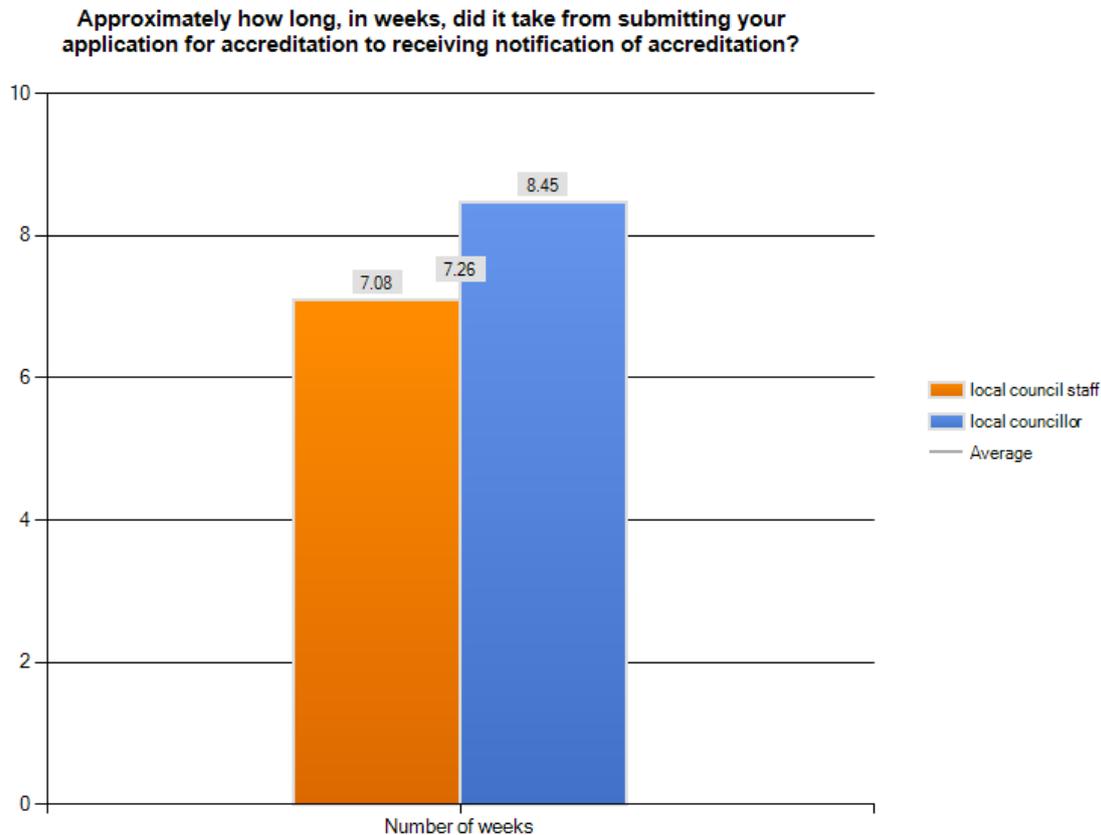


We also asked respondents how long it took for them to receive notice of accreditation. On average it took just over 7 weeks for councils to received notice of accreditation; local councillors on average reported that it took over a week more than the average reported by local council staff.

There was once again a large range in reported timescale, from 0 to 80 weeks, and so the following table looks at the frequency of different timescales:

| Approximately how long, in weeks, did it take from submitting your application for accreditation to receiving notification of accreditation? | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Time | No of responses - staff | % of staff responses | No of responses - cllrs | % of cllr responses | Total responses | Total % |
| 2 weeks or less | 25 | 10.9% | 4 | 12.1% | 29 | 10.5% |
| 3 - 4 weeks | 75 | 32.8% | 10 | 30.3% | 85 | 30.8% |
| 5 - 12 weeks | 114 | 49.8% | 15 | 45.5% | 129 | 46.7% |
| 13 - 26 weeks | 11 | 4.8% | 3 | 9.1% | 14 | 5.1% |
| more than 26 weeks | 4 | 1.7% | 1 | 3.0% | 5 | 1.8% |
| Total | 229 | | 33 | | 262 | |

There is much less variation here between answers between local council staff and local councillors, although local councillors are slightly more likely to report a longer time-frame for receiving notice of accreditation than local council staff. Overall between 88% of respondents received notice of accreditation within 12 weeks of having submitted their portfolios.

## Analysis

- The vast majority of accreditation decisions are made within 3 months of submitting a portfolio and less than 2% take longer than 6 months.
- This indicates that the current accreditation system is working efficiently in the majority of areas.

## County associations - dealing with accreditation submissions

The full data supporting this section is available in the spreadsheet CALC portfolio submission data.



Approximately how long, in hours, do you spend dealing with a single application for Quality Parish and Town Council Scheme accreditation?
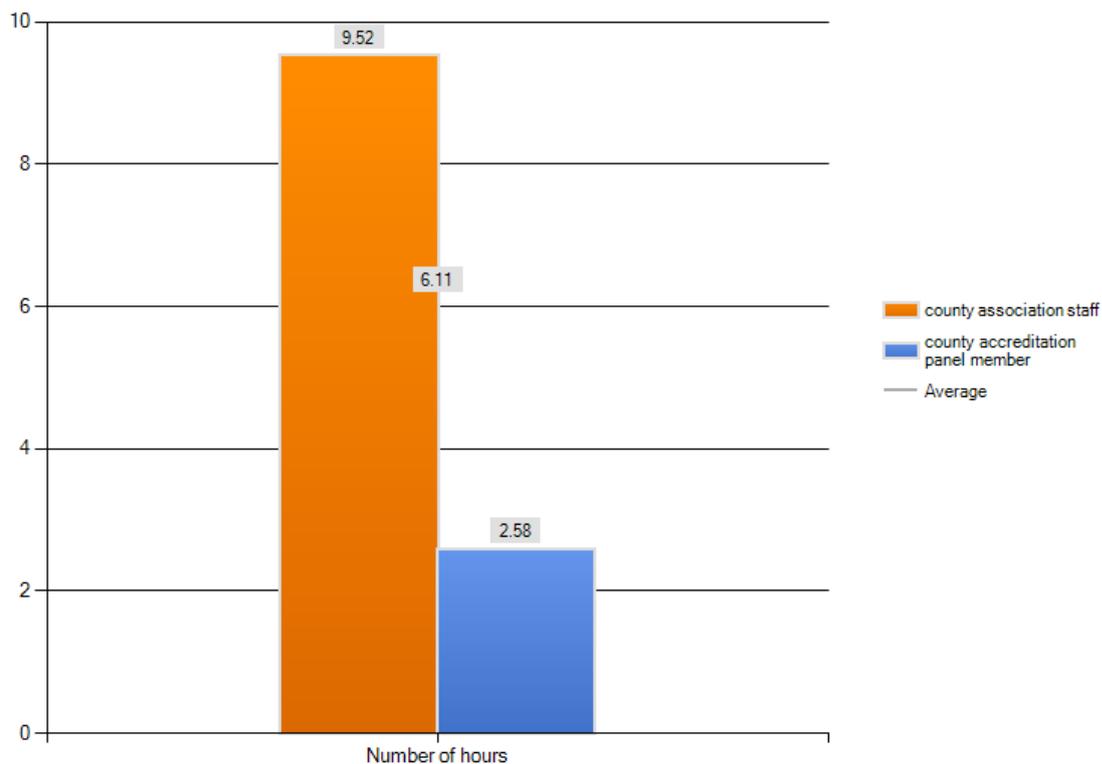
We asked county association staff and county accreditation panel members how long they spent, on average dealing with a single application for quality status. On average, county association staff spent approximately 9½ hours dealing with a single submission and county accreditation panel members spent approximately 2½ hours.

Looking at the distribution of responses in the table below, we can see that the range of timescales county association staff is from 2 - 40 hours and the range for county accreditation panel members is from 1 - 8 hours:

| Approximately how long, in hours, do you spend dealing with a single application for Quality Parish and Town Council Scheme accreditation? | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Time | No of responses - staff | % of staff responses | No of responses - cap | % of cap responses | Total resp | Total % |
| 1 hour | 0 | 0.0% | 10 | 38.5% | 10 | 18.9% |
| 2 hours | 2 | 7.4% | 8 | 30.8% | 10 | 18.9% |
| 3-5 hours | 11 | 40.7% | 6 | 23.1% | 17 | 32.1% |
| 6-10 hours | 10 | 37.0% | 2 | 7.7% | 12 | 22.6% |
| more than 20 hours | 4 | 14.8% | 0 | 0.0% | 4 | 7.5% |
| Total | 27 | | 26 | | 53 | |

Approximately 78% of county association staff spend between 3 and 10 hours dealing with a single submission and 92.4% of county accreditation panel members report that they spend 5 hours or less dealing with a single submission.

Analysis

- County association staff usually provide the secretariat to the county accreditation panel responsible for considering whether submissions provide the evidence necessary for accreditation. This means that the roles of county association staff and county accreditation panel members in dealing with accreditation submissions are very different, which is why there is a clear difference in the mean, the range and the distribution of the answers for the two groups.
- Evidence from structured interviews suggests that there is a wide range of practice in dealing with submissions for quality status, which is reflected in the range of timescales given
- Many county associations are investing significant amounts of staff time in processing applications – it is difficult to see how this could be covered by the current application costs.

## Methods of submission

The full data for the next sections is available in the spreadsheet "Methods of submission".

We asked respondents from councils with quality status how they would prefer to submit applications for quality status in the future:



**Which of the following options would be your preferred method for submitting an application for Quality Status in the future?**
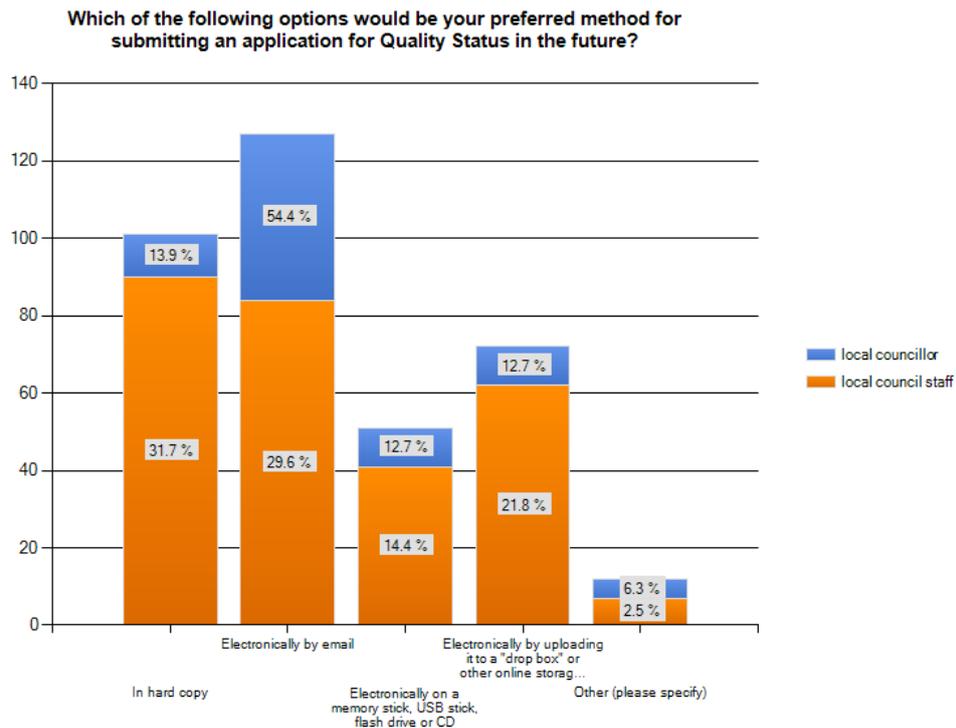
The most popular single choice for local council staff was submission via hard copy with 31.7% saying this was their preferred option, followed by 29.6% who chose email.

Overall, however, a majority (65.8%) of local council staff indicated they would prefer to submit their application electronically in some way. The majority of local councillors (54.4%) preferred email as a submission method with only 13.9% preferring submission in hard copy.

We also asked county association staff and county accreditation panel members how they would prefer to receive applications for quality status in the future:

**Which of the following options would be your preferred method for receiving an application for Quality Status in the future?**
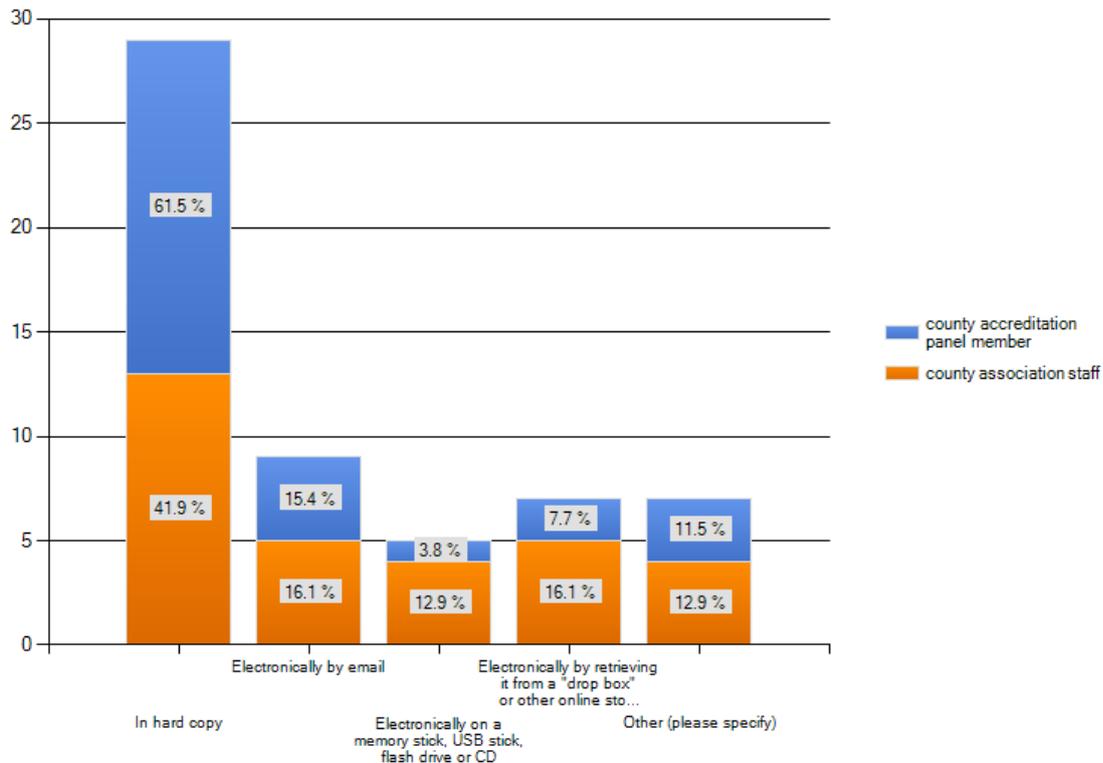


The most popular single response for county association staff was submission in hard copy, with 41.9% saying that this is what they would prefer, although 45.1% would prefer some form of electronic submission. County accreditation panel members overwhelmingly indicated that they would prefer submission in hard copy.

**Analysis**

- The responses do not mandate the introduction of an entirely electronic submission process although they indicate that there is a significant appetite for providing an electronic option.
- Many of the qualitative responses highlighted the difficulty of meeting the current tests electronically - this may have influenced some responses.
- Overall, those preparing the submissions are more favourable disposed towards electronic submissions than those receiving the submissions.
- This will need to be explored further if electronic submissions are to be permitted to ensure that county accreditation panel member's concerns are taken into account

## Self-certification for some tests

The full data supporting this section is available in the spreadsheet "Methods of submission".

In order to adopt the General Power of Competence councils must pass a formal resolution stating that they meet the legal eligibility criteria. The same method has been suggested as a way to allow councils to prove they meet selected Quality Parish and Town Council Scheme criteria. This could reduce the amount of evidence that must be provided as part of the accreditation submission and free up time for an in-depth examination of other criteria.Using the following scale, please indicate to what extent you agree with this suggestion:
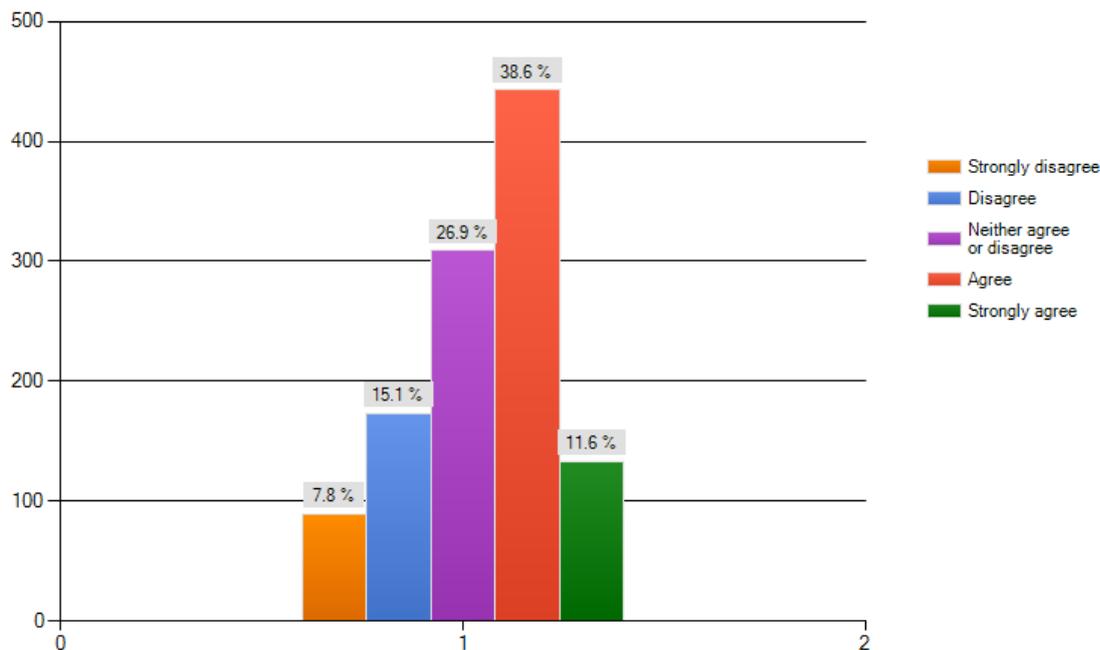


Overall the majority of respondents were in favour of this idea, with just over 50% stating that they either agreed or strongly agreed with the proposal, 26.9% stating they neither agreed nor disagreed, and 22.9% disagreeing or strongly disagreeing.

When this was broken down by role, however, respondents from local councils (both those with quality status and those without) were far more likely to support this proposal than respondents from county associations. Only 27.6% of county association staff and 23% of county accreditation panel members stated that they agreed or strongly agreed with the proposal, as opposed to 62% of county association staff and 54% of county accreditation panel members who disagreed or strongly disagreed. Opinion among county executive members was more varied, with 44% agreeing or strongly agreeing and 33% disagreeing or strongly disagreeing with the proposal.

Approximately 40% of principal council officers and 86% of principal councillors agreed or strongly agreed with the suggestion, as did 36% of other respondents, but as the sample sizes here are relatively small it is difficult to draw solid conclusions from these responses.

The issue of self-certification was also discussed in structured interviews with county association staff as well as in qualitative evidence submitted via the survey. Some respondents were concerned that self-certification would be open to abuse, were worried

about making the scheme less rigorous and emphasised the importance of independent assessment in awarding quality status. As the proposal was designed to enhance the role of the independent panel by shifting their focus from box-ticking to allow time for a more rigorous examination of the quality of evidence provided, these concerns may have been driven partly by a misunderstanding of what was being suggested.

There were also concerns that councils might misunderstand the criteria and would certify that they met them when they did not, thus devaluing quality status. Interviewees became more open to the proposal once it was explained that self-certification would only apply to those criteria which were either met or not met and did not require further scrutiny (e.g. number of elected councillors, qualification of the clerk).

Analysis
- There is a clear split on the question of self-certification between the views of respondents from councils and respondents from county associations.
- Feedback from the structured interviews suggests that some of the concerns about this proposal could be addressed by careful selection of the specific criteria which were addressed in this way.
- It is clearly important to emphasise that gaining quality status will always rely primarily on an assessment by an independent accreditation panel so that all stakeholders can have confidence in the rigour of the accreditation process.

## Submission and accreditation – qualitative evidence
As well as suggesting predetermined alternative methods of submission we also asked all respondents for their own suggestions, with an emphasis on improving the efficiency of the submission and accreditation process. Although a number responses indicated that the current submission and accreditation processes had worked well for them, there were some common themes which respondents felt should be addressed in the revised scheme:

- Updating the scheme to allow more creative use of electronic evidence
- Eliminating the need to providing duplicates of the same piece of evidence to meet different criteria
- Re-focusing the scheme to test outcomes and service delivery rather than process
- Simplifying the criteria – a number of respondents commented that the electoral mandate criteria was a significant barrier

Some respondents made specific suggestions or comments as follows:

- County accreditation panel members or secretary to check council website for relevant information rather than it being provided
- County accreditation panel secretary to analyse applications and provide a report for the panel outlining to what extent they meet the criteria
- A presentation to the panel to explain how the council meets the criteria in order minimise the time spent compiling hard copy evidence
- Accreditation panels meeting on set dates with a publicised timetable for when applications are accepted to be considered on those dates
- Clear guidance on how to compile an application for accreditation and/or model documentation
- Requiring councils to provide case studies describing how they promote community engagement

- Reduce the evidence that needs to be provided upon reaccreditation in order to avoid duplication
- County accreditation panels to carry out a site visit or spot-check during the accreditation period to assess the work of a council
- Accreditation criteria which allow for the differing priorities and activities of different sizes and types of council
- Decisions made on the evidence of the quality of activities and not just on whether or not they are carried out

**Analysis**
- Currently councils prove they meet the standards by providing a portfolio of evidence in hard copy; there are a number of alternative options which can be considered, either to replace or augment this approach
- Resources, both financial and human, will be need to be carefully considered in any proposed changes to the current process
- Further consultation with those staff and volunteers involved in the administration of the scheme will be vital to ensuring that any changes to the process are both practicable and cost-effective

## Consistency of accreditation decisions

The full data supporting this section is available in the spreadsheet "Ensuring consistency of marking".



**Under the current scheme the consistency of accreditation decisions is monitored by the annual examination of a random selection of portfolios by the National Stakeholder Group. This has proved difficult to administer and a number of other options for ensuring consistency have been suggested. Using the following scale, please indicate to what extent you agree with the following suggestions:**
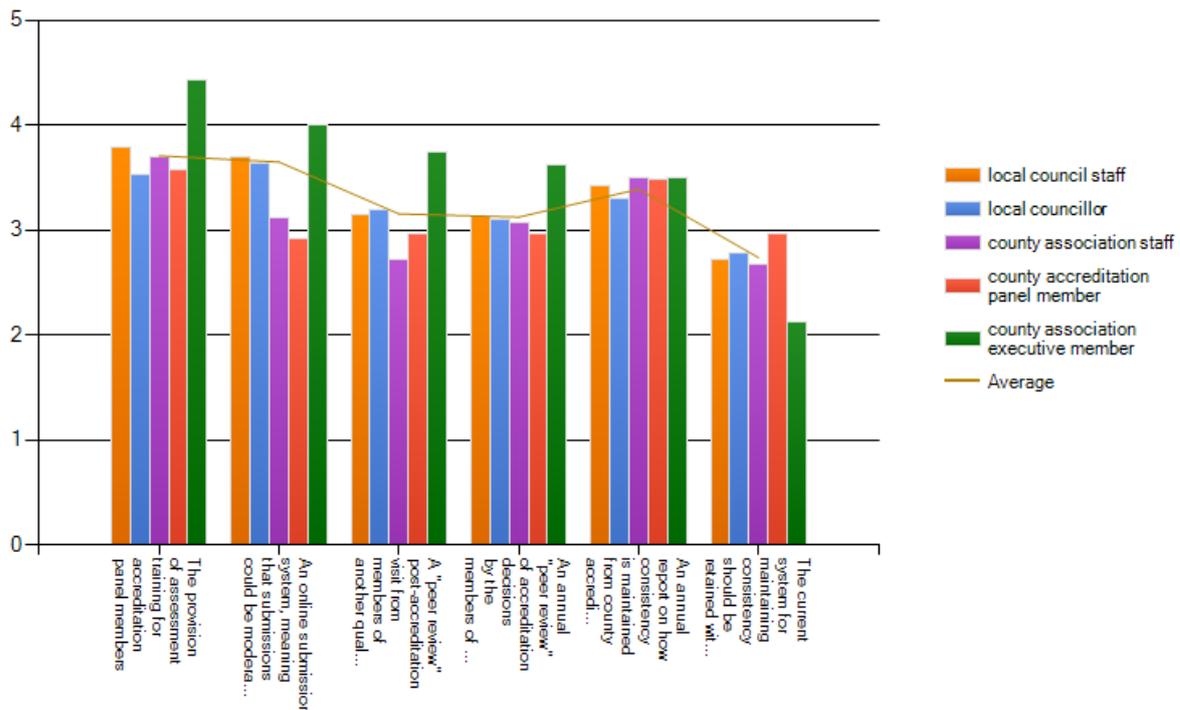
We asked respondents for their views on the following suggestions to help to ensure the consistency of accreditation decisions across the country, using a 1-5 scale, where 1= strongly disagree and 5= strongly agree:

- The provision of assessment training for accreditation panel members
- An online submission system, meaning that submissions could be moderated by accreditation panel members in different counties
- A "peer review" post-accreditation visit from members of another quality council
- An annual "peer review" of accreditation decisions by the members of another county accreditation panel
- An annual report on how consistency is maintained from county accreditation panels to the National Stakeholder Group
- The current system for maintaining consistency should be retained without change (this is an annual examination of a random selection of portfolios by the national stakeholder group

As you can see from the above graph, there was overall support for some change to the current system, as 36.4% of respondents overall disagreed or strongly disagreed that the

current system should be maintained without change, compared to 15% who agreed or strongly agreed with this statement, and 48.5% who neither agreed nor disagreed.

When looking at the responses as a whole, the most popular of the 2 options listed were the provision of training for accreditation panel members, with which 66.2% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed, and an online submission system, with which 67.4% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed.

When broken down by type of respondent, however, the online submission system divided opinion among county accreditation panel members – 19.2% strongly disagreed with this suggestion and 23.1% disagreed, while 30.8% agreed and 11.5% strongly agreed – meaning that 42.3% of respondents were balanced on either side of the 15.4% who neither agreed nor disagreed.

The two suggestions for "peer-review" mechanisms also divided opinion amongst respondents. Even though over a third of respondents indicated support for each proposal, nearly double the proportion of respondents answered that they disagreed or strongly disagreed with these proposals than disagreed or strongly disagreed with the other suggestions for change.

The suggestion for county accreditation panels to provide an annual report to the national stakeholder group had the most consistent level of support from all respondents although it was less popular with respondents from local councils than the suggestion for training and online submission.

As well as the predetermined suggestions above, we also asked respondents for other suggestions for ensuring consistency in accreditation. The most commonly mentioned suggestions were:

- Training for county accreditation panel members and county officers
- Marking handbook or written guidance for panel members

Other suggestions included:

- On demand advice and rulings to panels from the national stakeholder group
- Minutes of panel meetings and decisions to be circulated
- A national inspectorate who visit and accredit councils – similar to OFSTED
- Make it fully open and transparent: provide an online resource allowing full community review and commentary for all submissions and decisions. Monitor the feedback and act on it.
- Networking meetings for panel secretaries and chairmen
- Involve electorate and let them have a monitoring role.
- Establish a scheme that can be accredited effectively by an outside assessor so that any council achieving it can be assured of a nationally valued qualification (such as ISO9001) rather than something by local councils for local councils
- One member of any county accreditation panel must be from a neighbouring county panel

## Analysis

- In both their answer choices and qualitative feedback the majority of respondents supported a change in way in which consistency was monitored
- Some noted that greater transparency about the way in which accreditation decision are made would enhance the reputation of the scheme.
- There is widespread support for the provision of training for county accreditation panel members, including from approximately 70% of panel members themselves.
- The high support for moving towards electronic or online submission methods shown elsewhere is also highlighted in these responses, although there continues to be a division on this issue between respondents from local councils and those from county associations.
- Resources, both financial and human, will be need to be carefully considered in any proposed changes

## Length of accreditation



**How long should accreditation as a Quality Council last for? (Please choose one of the following):**

Legend:
- local council staff
- local councillor
- county association staff
- county accreditation panel member
- county association executive member
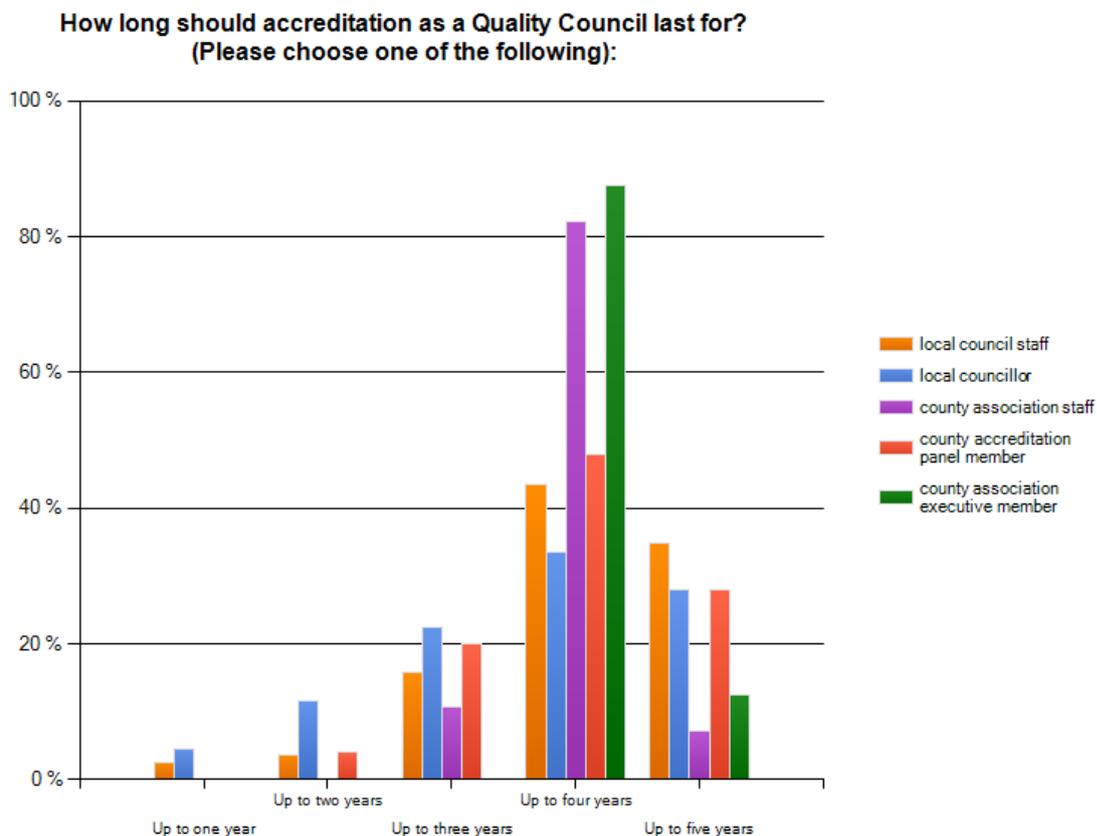
## Analysis

- The responses to this question show that the majority of respondents are happy with the current accreditation period of 4 years.

## Involving councillors

The full data supporting this section is available in the spreadsheet "involving councillors more"

Because previous feedback has suggested that often the task of putting together a submission for quality status falls entirely to the Clerk we asked respondents for their views on how local councillors might be encouraged to take more of a role in the quality parish and town council scheme accreditation process. Although some respondents felt that this should remain primarily the role of the clerk, most respondents felt that more councillor involvement would be a positive move. The following measures were the most commonly suggested:

- Appoint a councillor to act as a "quality champion" on the council.
- Motivate councillors to be involved by better demonstrating the benefits of quality status to residents and the whole community.
- Change the tests so that they focus less on documentation – at the moment the clerk is the one person who has access to all the evidence required.
- Set up a quality parish working group to oversee and help with the submission and report back to the full council on progress.
- Require "references" from residents or community groups as to the work and quality of the council.
- Make councillor involvement one of the criteria for accreditation, in one of the following ways:
  o a test that only councillors can fulfil;
  o a test asking for details/case studies of what contribution councillors make to the work of council;
  o a signed declaration asserting that councillors have been involved;
  o a presentation or telephone interview with the county accreditation panel which involves councillors, and where councillors can be questioned.

## Analysis
- Several respondents noted that without any mandatory councillor involvement the scheme can become a measure of the quality of the clerk rather than the council as a whole.
- Other respondents expressed concern that, as volunteers, councillors' time may be limited which may discourage accreditation.
- The suggestions above outline three slightly different approaches to involving councillors in quality council accreditation for the stakeholder group to consider:
  o Promoting councillor involvement in the process of gaining quality status as a matter of best practice;
  o Amending the criteria to include a requirement for evidence of the work of councillors in the community, or references from local citizens or community groups;
  o Amending the criteria or the accreditation process so that accreditation cannot be gained without some level of councillor involvement.

## The benefits of the quality town and parish council scheme

The full data supporting this section is available in the spreadsheet "Benefits of the scheme".

Feedback from focus groups held during 2010 and 2011 indicated that some people felt the sector stakeholders to the scheme should lobby the government and principal councils to grant benefits and rights to quality councils that are not available to councils without quality status. The structured interviews and qualitative responses through the online survey also highlighted that many respondents felt that achieving quality status ought to carry with it more tangible benefits for councils and communities.

Because the current policy of both NALC and SLCC is to lobby for benefits and rights for all councils, and not just those with quality status, this would represent a change in practice. We therefore asked respondents their views regarding a number of statements relating to whether extra benefits should be available to councils with quality status and whether central government and principal councils should treat councils with quality status differently to those without quality status. Respondents were asked to rate the statements using a 1-5 scale, where 1= strongly disagree and 5= strongly agree:



The statements were designed to thoroughly test respondents' views by asking similar questions in both a positive and negative frame, as follows:

- Being accredited as a quality council should mean that a council has access to benefits or rights that councils without quality status do not
- Principal councils should treat quality councils more favourably than councils without quality status
- Central government should not discriminate between quality councils and councils without quality status
- Central government should include incentives for quality councils in future legislation
- Principal councils should not discriminate between quality councils and councils without quality status
- Central government and principal councils should make the same rights available to all local councils

Responses to these statements varied considerably by the respondent's role and also by whether or not a council had quality status. Overall, as shown by the graph above, respondents from county associations were more likely than those from local councils to agree with statements indicating that councils with quality status should get access to more benefits than those without quality status.

When the respondents from local councils are broken down into respondents from councils with quality status, those without quality status and those do not know whether or not their council holds quality status, it becomes clear that respondents from councils with quality status are significantly more likely than those from councils without quality status to agree that councils with quality status should get access to extra rights or benefits:



Feedback from the Focus Groups indicated that some people felt we should lobby the government and principal councils to grant benefits and rights to Quality Councils that are not available to councils without Quality Status. This would represent a change from current policy which is to lobby for benefits and rights for all councils. With this in mind, please indicate how much you agree with the following statements:
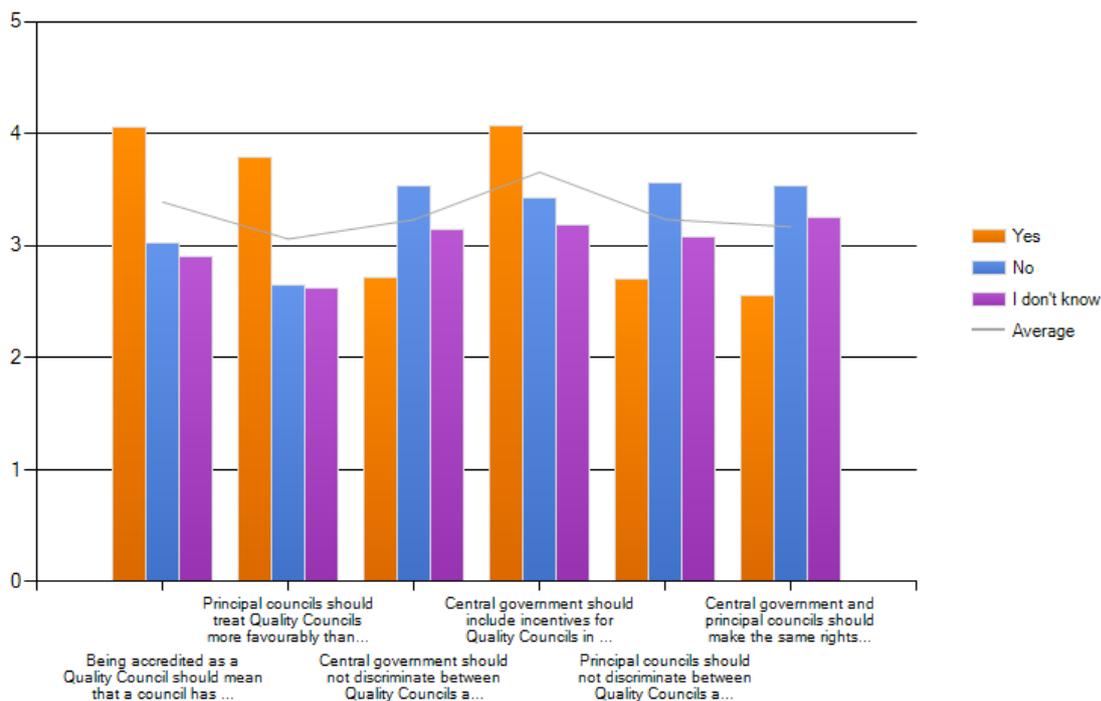
The only statement for which there was clear overall support was the statement **"Central government should include incentives for quality councils in future legislation"**. There was still greater support for this from respondents from quality councils, with 85.6% of respondents agreeing or strongly agreeing with the suggestion, but a majority (61.9%) of respondents from councils without quality status also agreed or strongly agreed with this suggestion, as did 87.3% of respondents from county associations.

The views of respondents from councils without quality status regarding the statement **"Being accredited as a quality council should mean that a council has access to benefits or rights that councils without quality status do not"** were split, with 48.4% agreeing or strongly agreeing with this, as opposed to 40.4% who disagreed or strongly disagreed. When asked to rate a similar statement phrased in a different way, however, 55.8% agreed or strongly agreed that all councils should have access to the same rights from principal councils and central government.

**Analysis**
- Whether or not a respondent was in favour of extra rights or benefits for quality councils was strongly related to their role, with respondents from county associations and quality councils favouring extra benefits for quality councils, and respondents from councils without quality status generally not in favour of this.
- There was, however, clear support from all respondents for lobbying central government to include incentives for councils with quality status in future legislation; this gives the stakeholders to the scheme a clear mandate to pursue this with central government in the future.

## Specific policy benefits

At the request of the NALC policy committee, we also asked respondents for their views regarding whether the scheme stakeholders should lobby for some specific benefits or rights. These were chosen because there is no current policy commitment to lobby for them to be extended to all local councils:



If the National Stakeholders to the Quality Parish and Town Council Scheme were to lobby the government to grant benefits or rights to Quality Councils that are not available to councils without Quality Status, for which benefits or rights should they lobby? (please tick any which apply):
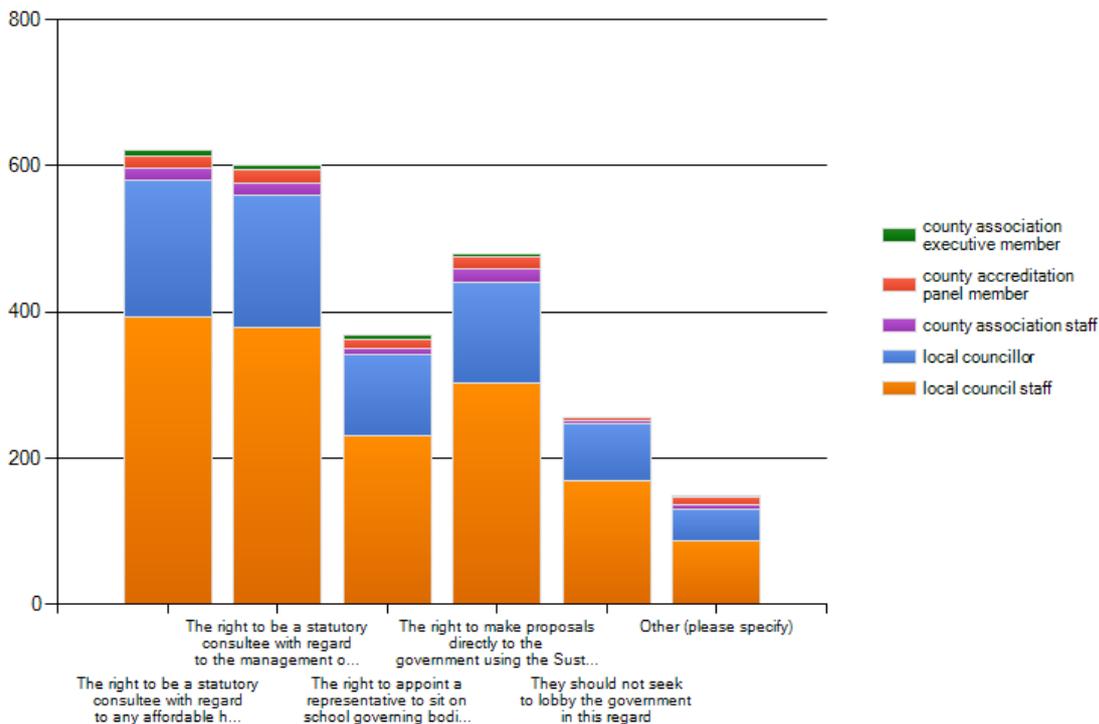
The full text of the proposals was as follows:

- **The right to be a statutory consultee with regard to any affordable housing proposals within their parish or town area**

This was the most popular proposal for all groups except county association staff, who ranked it 3rd, although a majority (55.6%) still supported it, and county association executive members, who ranked it joint 1st with statement 2

- **The right to be a statutory consultee with regard to the management of sports and recreational facilities, footpaths and bridleways provided by principal authorities in their parish or town area**

This was the second most popular proposal for all groups, except county association executive members who ranked it joint 2nd with statement 1

- **The right to appoint a representative to sit on school governing bodies with premises within their parish**

This was the last popular positive proposal overall, garnering less than 50% support from all groups except county association executive members, 75% of whom supported it, making it their 3rd favourite proposal

- **The right to make proposals directly to the government using the Sustainable Communities Act**
This was the 3<sup>rd</sup> favourite proposal for all groups except county association staff, who ranked it 1<sup>st</sup>

- **They should not seek to lobby the government in this regard**
25.4% of all respondents chose this option, meaning that nearly 75% of all respondents supported some form of lobbying on behalf of quality councils

When broken down by whether or not respondents were from councils which had quality status this ranking of the options did not change significantly, although respondents from councils without quality status were less likely to support the concept of extra benefits or rights for quality councils. 34.8% of such respondents answered that the stakeholders should not seek to lobby the government to grant benefits or rights to quality councils that are not available to councils without quality status, compared with 11.2% of respondents from councils with quality status and 25.4% of all respondents. This still means that over 60% of respondents councils without quality status did not directly state an opposition to lobbying for extra rights or benefits for quality councils.

### Analysis
- The majority of all respondents supported one or more of the proposals for extra rights or benefits to be given to quality councils, including 65.2% of respondents from councils without quality status. This seems to contradict the evidence from the previous question that respondents from councils without quality status are not in favour of extra rights and benefits for quality councils.
- Because this question is phrased hypothetically, however, it may have led respondents into giving a more positive response than they would otherwise have done; the safest conclusion to draw is there is a range of opinion on this issue among councils without quality status.
- The most popular proposal overall was that quality councils should have: "The right to be a statutory consultee with regard to any affordable housing proposals within their parish or town area".
- The second most popular overall was that quality councils should have: "The right to be a statutory consultee with regard to the management of sports and recreational facilities, footpaths and bridleways provided by principal authorities in their parish or town area".
- Both of these rights relate to relationships with principal councils; in areas where relationships are good, local councils may already be exercising these rights in practice if not in statute.

### Other benefits or rights – qualitative evidence
In addition to the predefined options listed above, we also asked respondents for examples of any other benefits or rights for which they thought the national stakeholders should lobby to be made available to councils with quality status. A number of respondents expressed the view that the predefined benefits should be made available to all local councils, but the majority of comments supported the idea that quality councils should have extra rights or benefits. The proposals can be broken down into the following main themes:

**Planning and licensing**

Quality councils should have:

- The right to deal with minor planning applications;
- The right to send a representative to the principal authority planning committee;
- The right of appeal regarding planning applications in their council area;
- The right to be a statutory consultee for any planning applications in their council area;
- The right to be a statutory consultee in alcohol and public entertainment licence applications in their council area.

**Funding**

Quality councils should receive:

- 40% of any funding from any Community Infrastructure Levy;
- Access to dedicated funding streams from central government;
- Rates relief on the same basis as not for profit/charities in relation to community buildings;
- A percentage of the New Homes Bonus and Business Rates;
- Immunity from having to hold a referendum in order to raise the precept;
- A fast-track to applying for or receiving national lottery awards.

**Service delegation**

Quality councils should be able to:

- Take over the running of local services from principal council (e.g. car parking, local leisure provision, cemeteries) with delegated funds and the onus on the principal council to demonstrate why not if they disagree.
- Have access to an external appeal mechanism to arbitrate when a local council wishes to assume duties a principal council does not wish to relinquish.

**Other incentives for quality councils**

- Financial incentives negotiated with suppliers - perhaps in terms of bulk purchasing or reduced insurance premiums;
- The right to operate civil parking enforcement;
- The right to close any unclassified road for up to 6 hours 3 times per year without permission from the highway authority, subject to correct notice and signage.

**Analysis**

- The principal council relationship also emerges as of key importance in the qualitative responses with the key themes of more involvement in planning and service delegation mirroring the responses to the previous question.
- This raises an important question: is it appropriate for the quality parishes scheme to be seen as a tool to force principal councils to work more closely with, or delegate services to, local councils?
- Access to more funding or resources from central government initiatives also emerged as a key theme with several suggestions for how this might be achieved, some mirroring existing incentive schemes for other initiatives (e.g. gaining a higher percentage of CIL for having a Neighbourhood Plan).
- The only suggestion which was not ultimately in the hands of principal councils or central government was that of negotiating preferential deals for quality councils with suppliers; this option could be pursued by the national stakeholder group immediately.

## The aims of the quality town and parish council scheme

The full data supporting this section is available in the spreadsheet "Aims of the scheme".

### Identifying the aims of the scheme

Feedback from the focus groups suggested that there were a range of views about what the overall aims of the quality parish and town council scheme should be.

Some participants in the focus groups felt that that the key aim should be to establish and promote a minimum standard of performance within the sector, and that the scheme should be redesigned to allow a greater number of councils to attain quality status. Others felt that the scheme should do more to recognise and promote excellence and best practice, and that the scheme should be redesigned with these factors in mind. Still others felt that the scheme should focus on encouraging a culture of continuous improvement and, as such, should require reaccrediting councils to show improvement, rather than meeting the same tests as at accreditation. In addition some focus group participants said that they felt the current scheme was too "one-size-fits-all" and that the new scheme should be flexible enough to acknowledge different types of achievement in different councils, whilst others were concerned about maintaining the scheme as representing a clearly understood standard of achievement.

As there are some inherent tensions between these different aims for the scheme we asked respondents to the survey for their views on a number of statements regarding the aims of the quality parish and town council scheme. Respondents were asked to rate the statements using a 1-5 scale, where 1= strongly disagree and 5= strongly agree:
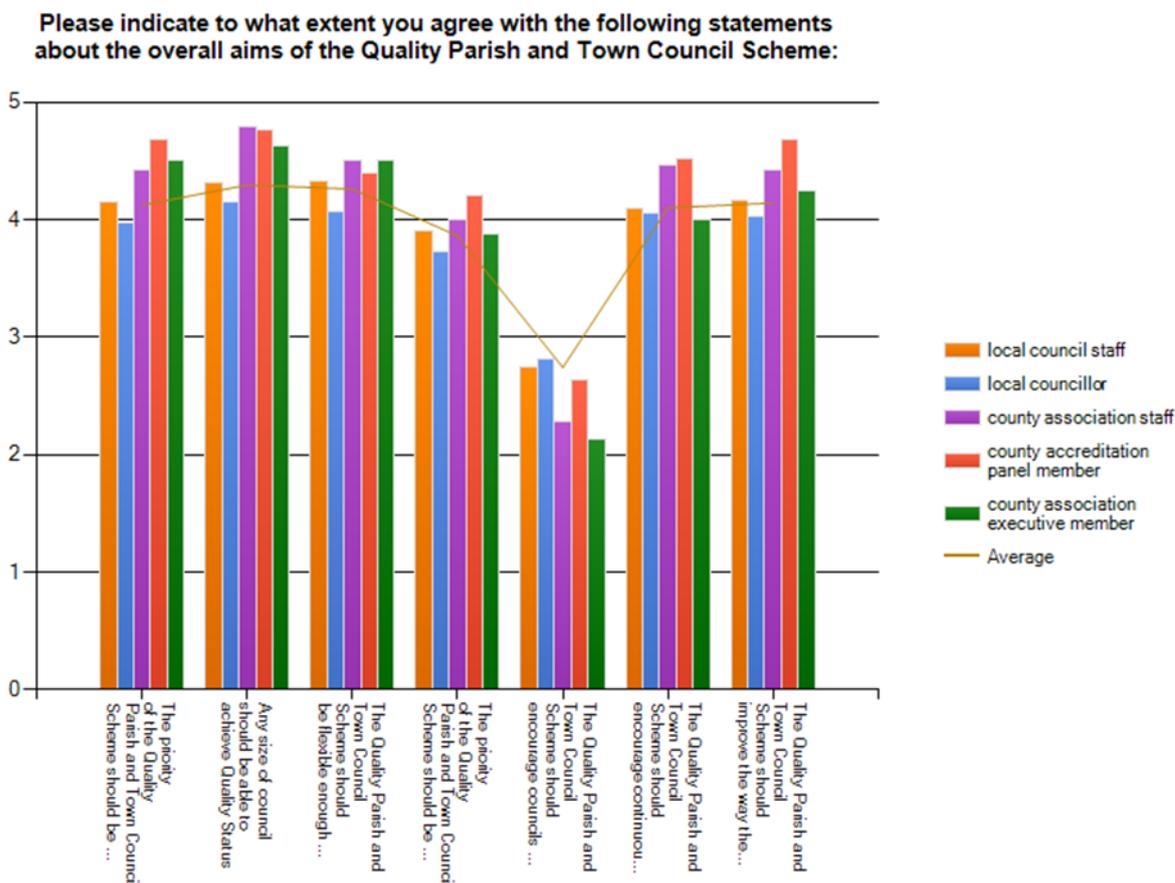
The full text of the statements was as follows:

- **The priority of the quality parish and town council scheme should be to provide a benchmark for excellence within the sector**
  There was overall support for this statement – 85% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed with it.

- **Any size of council should be able to achieve quality status**
  There was overall support for this statement – 91.7% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed with it.

- **The quality parish and town council scheme should be flexible enough to celebrate the diverse ways in which local councils serve their communities**
  There was overall support for this statement – 91.1% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed with it.

- **The priority of the quality parish and town council scheme should be to establish minimum standards within the sector**
  There was overall support for this statement, although not as much as for the previous 3 – 74.6% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed with it.

- **The quality parish and town council scheme should encourage councils to do things in the same way**
  This statement split opinion. Overall, more respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement (47%) than agreed or strongly agreed (27.3%) with over a quarter (25.7%) stating that they neither agreed nor disagreed.

- **The quality parish and town council cheme should encourage continuous improvement**
  There was overall support for this statement – 85.9% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed with it.

- **The quality parish and town council scheme should improve the way the local councils are perceived in their communities**
  There was overall support for this statement – 84.4% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed with it.

When the responses were broken down by role, or whether the respondent came from a council with quality status, there were some correlations between the level of agreement and role or quality status for every statement except the statement: "The quality parish and town council scheme should encourage councils to do things in the same way."

For many of the other statements, respondents from councils without quality status and local councillors were more likely to give lower ratings to the statements than respondents from quality councils, local council staff or county associations. Those lower ratings do not translate into disagreement with the statements, however, as the majority of respondents from councils without quality status and local councillors still agreed or strongly agreed with each statement.

## Analysis

- Although there is some differentiation of responses by role and quality status, as seen in other questions, it does not in this case point to a significant difference of opinion as to the aims of the scheme.
- Respondents are as a whole strongly supportive of a number of different, potentially conflicting, aims for the scheme.
- The strongest levels of support were for a scheme that was flexible enough to encompass all sizes of council and celebrate their diverse achievements.
- Opinion varied regarding whether the scheme should encourage councils to do things in the same way, although the strong support for flexibility and diversity shown above would seem to add weight to the 47% of respondents who disagreed with this suggestion.

## Meeting the aims of the scheme

We also asked respondents for their views on a number of statements relating to the ways in which the quality town and parish council scheme might be structured in order to meet its aims. Respondents were asked to rate the statements using a 1-5 scale, where 1= strongly disagree and 5= strongly agree:
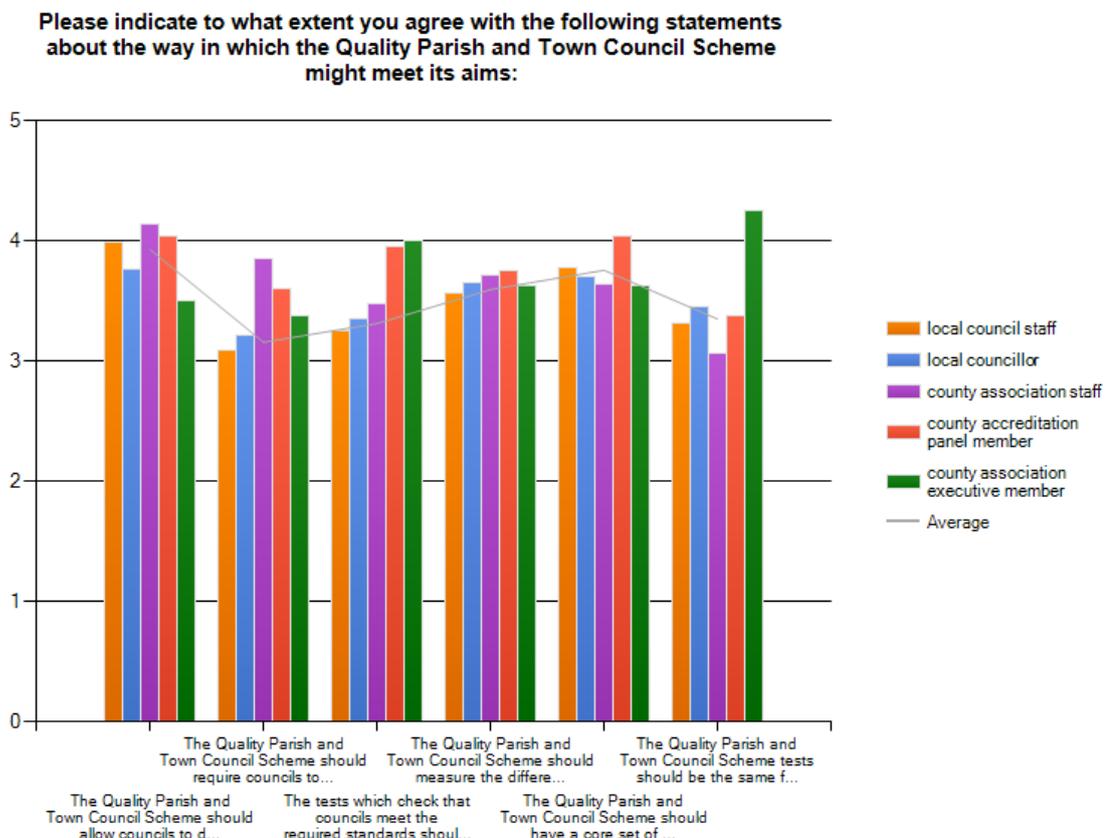


The full text of the statements was as follows:

- **The quality parish and town council scheme should allow councils to demonstrate they meet the standards in different ways**

There was overall support for this statement – 79.7% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed with it.

- **The quality parish and town council scheme should require councils to demonstrate improvement at reaccreditation**
  This statement split opinion. A small majority of respondents from county associations were in favour (60.7%) and 44.8% of respondents from councils with quality status agreed or strongly agreed, as opposed to 28.2% who disagreed or strongly disagreed. Respondents from councils without quality status were predominantly indifferent – 40.3% neither agreed nor disagreed.

- **The tests which check that councils meet the required standards should be exactly the same for every council**
  This statement split opinion. 49.8% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed with this statement, 22.9% neither agreed nor disagreed and 27.3% disagreed or strongly disagreed. Overall there was stronger support for this statement from respondents from county associations (70% agreed or strongly agreed) and respondents from quality councils (53.9% agreed or strongly agreed).

- **The quality parish and town council scheme should measure the difference a council makes to their community**
  There was overall support for this statement – 62.2% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed with it.

- **The quality parish and town council scheme should have a core set of standards that all councils should have to meet and some more rigorous standards that councils can meet if they want to show improvement or excellence**
  There was overall support for this statement – 72.6% of respondents either agreed or strongly agreed with it.

- **The quality parish and town council scheme tests should be the same for reaccrediting councils as it is for councils accrediting for the first time**
  There was overall support for this statement – 54.8% of respondents either agreed or strongly agreed with it. However, a significant minority (31.1%) of respondents from councils with quality status disagreed or strongly disagreed with this statement.

Although there were some further correlations of support levels for these statements with roles and quality status, unless mentioned above, these did not translate into a significant difference from the average response.

**Analysis**
- There is clear support shown here for a scheme which allows councils to demonstrate they meet the standards in different ways.
- Respondents were more equivocal, however, when responding to the seemingly contradictory statement "The tests which check that councils meet the required standards should be exactly the same for every council".
- Similarly, these responses show that opinion is divided over whether councils should show improvement at accreditation, or meet the same tests as on first accreditation.

- There is, however, strong support for a scheme with core set of standards for all quality councils supplemented by optional more rigorous tests.
- This proposal might provide a way to resolve potential contradictions: the core tests could be the same for all, at accreditation or reaccreditation, with the optional tests providing an opportunity to showcase diversity or improvement as required.

## The structure of the scheme

When we held focus groups in 2011/12 there were a number of suggestions about how the Quality Parish and Town Council Scheme might be structured in the future. Some respondents felt that the standards should be simplified so that more councils could participate in the scheme, some felt the standards should be more rigorous to allow Quality Councils to demonstrate excellence and others suggested a tiered scheme with standards for achievement at different levels so that core standards and excellence could both be recognised. Please tell us which of the following is, in your opinion, the best model for the Quality Parish and Town Council Scheme in the future:
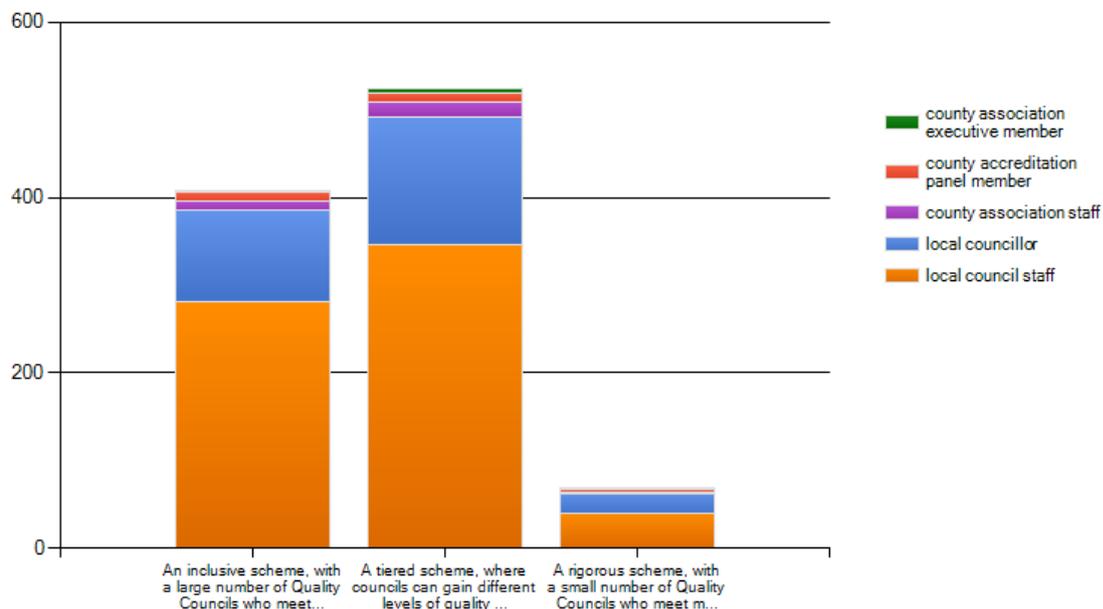


The full text of the options was as follows:

- **An inclusive scheme, with a large number of quality councils who meet accessible standards**
  40.4% of respondents chose this option

- **A tiered scheme, where councils can gain different levels of quality accreditation by meeting standards at different levels**
  52.5% of respondents chose this option

- **A rigorous scheme, with a small number of quality councils who meet more testing standards**
  7.1% of respondents chose this option

There were no significant differences in response to this question when broken down by role or quality status.

**Analysis**
- The majority of respondents favoured a tiered scheme. This is supported by the answers to previous questions.
- A significant minority, however, favour an inclusive scheme, with accessible standards which can be met by a large number of councils. This should influence the design of core standards or basic tier of the scheme.

**Number of tiers**

We asked respondents for their views on how many tiers there should be if we were to move towards a tiered scheme. Those respondents who did not believe there should be tiers were also invited to respond:

| Response | No tiers | 2 tiers | 3 tiers | 4 tiers | 5 tiers | 6 or more tiers |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Number of respondents | 320 | 77 | 408 | 33 | 36 | 9 |

There was no significant different in response rate when broken down by role within the scheme or quality status.

**Analysis**
- Again, the majority of respondents were in favour of a tiered system
- Respondents who are in favour of tiers are overwhelmingly in favour of 3 tiers
- Evidence from structured interviews and other qualitative evidence throughout the survey suggested that many of those who are not in favour of tiers are concerned that the scheme will become too complicated: this will need to be considered carefully in the scheme design.

**Naming the tiers**

We asked respondents for suggestions for what the tiers in a tiered system could be called. The full list of suggestions is available on the full data set at the start of this section; because the responses above indicate a clear preference for 3 tiers I have only summarised suggestions for names for three tiers.

It was clear from the responses that there were 2 different ways in which respondents had interpreted the concept of tiers. Some respondents felt that the tiers should correspond to the size of councils either in terms of councillors, precept or electorate, and that the accreditation criteria for each tier should therefore be constructed so as to be relevant to the sorts of activities that different sizes of council usually undertake. The vast majority of respondents who interpreted the tiers in this way suggested that the nomenclature be linked to existing size distinctions for councils as follows:

- Small quality council, medium quality council, large quality council

The majority of respondents, however, interpreted the purpose of a tiered system as being a qualitative measure of the output of a council – so that a council at a higher tier

would not only be doing more, but might also be doing the same thing but at a higher level. The most popular suggestions for names for these tiers (from lowest tier to highest tier) were:

- Bronze, silver, gold (this was by far the most suggested option)
- Tier 3, Tier 2, Tier 1
- 1 star, 2 star, 3 star
- Good, excellent, outstanding
- Aspiring to quality status, quality status, beyond quality status
- Pass, merit, distinction
- Core, intermediate, advanced
- Developing, achieving, outstanding
- Competent, advanced, leading

**Analysis**
- It will be necessary to be very clear about whether the tiers are linked to council size or to quality of output.
- If the tiers are linked to quality of output, it will be important to ensure that councils are not restricted from achieving the highest tier because of their size.
- Many respondents who did not support tiers were concerned about the scheme become too complex – this concern will need to be addressed.
- Many respondents were also concerned that the introduction of tiers would be overly divisive or would devalue those councils who only met the lowest tier - this concern will need to be addressed.

## The criteria for becoming a quality council

The full data supporting this section is available in the spreadsheet "What does a quality council do".

We asked respondents for their views on a number of statements relating to what a quality council should do in practice to show that it merits quality status. Some of these statements were based upon draft indicators drawn up by the national stakeholder group (Appendix A), some of them were based on the more controversial criteria from the current scheme and some were included to facilitate validation of responses. Respondents were asked to rate these statements using a 1-5 scale, where 1= not at all important, 2 = slightly important, 3 = fairly important, 4 = important and 5= very important:

| A Quality Council should demonstrate that it: | Rating Average |
|---|---|
| Has an open and transparent accounting system and makes details of completed accounts available to the public in a variety of ways | 4.45 |
| Demonstrates a commitment to valuing staff, councillors and members of the public and treating them with respect | 4.43 |
| Regularly checks that it is meeting its legal obligations and operating within the law | 4.38 |
| Ensures that all staff members have a written contract and are employed in accordance with the national standard terms and conditions | 4.35 |
| Makes information about council meetings, business and decisions available to the public in a variety of ways | 4.34 |
| Is accountable to the local community, both through the democratic process, and through regular community engagement | 4.32 |
| Where appropriate, provides a high quality of service delivery which meets the needs of the community | 4.28 |
| Has transparent internal and external policies and procedures and makes details of these available to the public in a variety of ways | 4.27 |
| Publicises elections and takes steps to attract candidates for election to the council | 4.27 |
| Works in partnership with individuals, groups and organisations to develop and facilitate projects of community benefit | 4.20 |
| Develops and implements strategies to find out what is important to all members of their community | 4.18 |
| Devises and implements effective solutions to local problems | 4.14 |
| Encourages people to vote in local council elections | 4.12 |
| Makes sure that staff and councillors have the requisite skills, knowledge and expertise to serve the whole community by investing in professional development and sector qualifications | 4.07 |
| Advocates on behalf of the community with principal councils, business and | 4.03 |
| Produces a formal annual report with details of the council's activities over the previous year | 4.01 |
| Develops and implements strategies to ensure two-way communication with the whole community, including with groups who are hard to reach | 3.96 |
| Demonstrates a commitment to continuous improvement | 3.92 |
| Pays for its clerk to be a member of the Society of Local Council Clerks | 3.73 |
| Has a clerk who holds at least the Certificate in Local Council Administration, the Certificate of Higher Education in Local Policy or Local Council Administration, or the first level of the foundation degree in Community Engagement and Governance, or its successor qualifications, awarded by the University of Gloucestershire | 3.72 |
| Sets strategic goals and measures to what extent those goals are achieved | 3.50 |
| Is a member of the relevant County Association and the National Association of Local Councils | 3.41 |
| Has an elected (as opposed to co-opted) membership of at least two-thirds | 3.36 |
| Has resolved to use the General Power of Competence | 3.30 |
| Does the same things as other Quality Councils | 2.71 |

Overall, a majority of respondents rated every statement as important or very important, except for two statements:

- Has resolved to use the general power of competence
- Does the same things as other quality councils

This is also reflected in the average ratings shown in the table above.

When broken down by role, respondents from the councils that hold quality status rate the importance of given statements higher than respondents from the councils that do not hold such status. DEFRA statistical analysis shows that the differences in their ratings are statistically significant for 20 out of 25 statements.

Despite the fact that in general councils with quality status give the statements higher scores, the rating positions of particular statements are pretty similar for both the councils holding and not holding quality status. For example, in both groups of respondents the "top" 5 statements are the same as the overall "top" 5 in the table above.

The "bottom" 5 statements are also consistent for both the councils holding and not holding quality status with the exception of the statement relating to the clerk holding sector qualifications.[3] This statement is in the "bottom" 5 with average rate of just 3.36 by respondents from councils not holding quality status, but is in the middle of the rating list with average rate of 4.28 by respondents from councils holding quality status.

There are 6 statements which ratings differ depending on the respondent's role within the council (local councillor versus council staff). The following 5 statements are rated higher by the council staff than by local councillors:

- Ensures that all staff members have a written contract and are employed in accordance with the national standard terms and conditions
- Demonstrates a commitment to valuing staff, councillors and members of the public and treating them with respect
- Pays for its clerk to be a member of the society of local council clerks
- Makes sure that staff and councillors have the requisite skills, knowledge and expertise to serve the whole community by investing in professional development and sector qualifications
- Has a clerk who holds at least the certificate in local council administration, the certificate of higher education in local policy or local council administration, or the first level of the foundation degree in community engagement and governance, or its successor qualifications, awarded by the university of Gloucestershire

The following statement is rated higher by local councillors than by council staff:

- Has resolved to use the general power of competence

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[3] Has a clerk who holds at least the Certificate in Local Council Administration, the Certificate of Higher Education in Local Policy or Local Council Administration, or the first level of the foundation degree in Community Engagement and Governance, or its successor qualifications, awarded by the University of Gloucestershire

Again, however, the list of the "top" and "bottom" 5 statements looks similar for both council staff and local councillors. The one exception is the statement relating to staff members' contracts and terms and conditions[4], which is in the "top" 5 with average rating of 4.44 by council staff, but in the middle of the rating list with average rate of 4.07 by local councillors.

Respondents from county associations rated most statements more generously than respondents from local councils and the list of their "top" and "bottom" 5 statements looks very similar to the average ratings in the table above, with a few exceptions.

The most significant of these is that they rated the statement relating to a council paying for its clerk to be a member of the SLCC[5] in their bottom "5" with a rating of 3.36, as opposed to the average 3.73 and rated the statement relating to the membership of NALC and the CALC[6] at 3.93 which is rather higher than the average 3.41.

**Analysis**
- The only statement which scores less than 3 is "Does the same things as other quality councils". This is consistent with evidence given earlier in the survey about the need for the scheme to recognise different types of achievement.
- All of the statements which are taken from the draft indicators score an average rating of approximately 4 or above (there are two statements which score 3.92 and 3.96 respectively) except for the statement "Sets strategic goals and measures to what extent those goals are achieved" which is in the bottom 5 for all types of respondent.
- Statements relating to corporate and professional membership score towards the bottom of the list for all respondents.
- Having a clerk who holds the specific sector qualification and two-thirds of members elected score in the bottom 5 for all types of respondent. This may be related to evidence earlier in the survey that these criteria are seen by many as key barriers to participation in the scheme.

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[4] Ensures that all staff members have a written contract and are employed in accordance with the national standard terms and conditions
[5] Pays for its clerk to be a member of the Society of Local Council Clerks
[6] Is a member of the relevant County Association and the National Association of Local Councils

**Qualitative evidence**

**Online comments, written submissions and structured interviews**

In addition to the online survey, the national stakeholders to the quality town and parish council scheme agreed to conduct a number of structured interviews, in order to further explore some of the issued raised in the survey. In addition to this, a number of written consultation responses were received, both before and after the online survey was launched and at the end of the online survey respondents to the consultation were given an opportunity to give any views or comments which they had not been able to express anywhere else in the survey.

Where relevant, the qualitative evidence generated by these 3 consultation methods has been woven into the commentary in the online survey report and analysis. This section summarises the qualitative responses with the aim of highlighting best practice and adding insight, depth and colour to the consultation analysis and outcomes.

**Number of responses**

- **Structured interviews**

325 people indicated on the online survey that they would be willing to be contacted for a structured interview. We were able to interview approximately 10% of those who expressed an interest:

| Are you (Please choose the option that best describes your role.) | | |
|---|---|---|
| Answer Options | Response Percent | Response Count |
| local council staff | 27.3% | 9 |
| local councillor | 18.2% | 6 |
| county association staff | 18.2% | 6 |
| county accreditation panel member | 12.1% | 4 |
| principal council officer | 3.0% | 7 |
| other | 3.0% | 1 |
| answered question | | 33 |

- **Written submissions**

We received 10 written submissions, the majority of which were from county associations, often with input from the county accreditation panel. We received one written submission from a local council.

- **Comments on the online survey**

431 people gave an answer to the question "Is there anything else you would like to add regarding the review of the Quality Parish and Town Council Scheme?"

**Summary**

Overall, a wide variety of views, some of them conflicting, were expressed in the qualitative submissions. Unlike the online survey, it was not easy to see particular trends in opinion when considering responses from similar groups of people. The written submissions from county associations and county accreditation panels, for example, varied widely in their views of the future of the schemes, with some stating that county accreditation panels should play a bigger role in the scheme while others recommended

the abolition of the panels at county level and the establishment of a national accreditation system, similar to that used for CiLCA. The lack of consensus throughout the qualitative submissions serves to highlight the reasons behind the stakeholder group's decision to design a survey which required respondents to choose between specific options, as well as canvassing for opinions more generally. It is clear from the diversity of views expressed in the qualitative responses that no one scheme would be capable of embodying the preferences of all stakeholders. It is therefore important that the stakeholder group is able to explain the basis for decisions that will inevitably divide opinion. Quantitative evidence, such as that obtained from the survey, more easily permits statistical analysis of results to reveal overall trends on which decisions can be based.

### Key themes

Some of the issues raised in the qualitative responses were similar to those raised in the online survey. Where a similar range of differing views is expressed in both the survey and the qualitative responses, I have not summarised those here, as they will be reflected in the online survey report. I have, however, summarised the following areas of consensus, which, although not necessarily missing from the online survey, were expressed particularly strongly in the qualitative responses:

- The need for there to be tangible benefits from attaining quality status for both the council and community. This was particularly highlighted by a number of comments from respondents from councils who currently hold quality status who were not planning to reaccredit because of a lack of perceived benefits when compared to the effort needed to attain quality status.
- The need for the scheme to concentrate more on outcomes rather than just on process.
- The need for the scheme to avoid a one-size-fits-all approach, and celebrate diversity of achievement.
- The need for the scheme to be credible outside of the sector, and in particular to be seen as credible by principal authorities and communities.
- The need for the scheme to only measure things that are within a council's control - efforts to get people to stand for election should be recognised instead of just the electoral mandate.

### Specific suggestions

In addition to more general themes, there were a number of specific comments and issues raised for consideration by the stakeholder group, which are summarised by respondent group.

#### County associations and accreditation panels

- The process of accreditation could start with a council announcing that it wants to achieve Quality Status. They should have a year within which to attain it, with clear timetables for submission to make sure the panel have enough time to consider the submission before meeting.
- County accreditation panels could be involved in supporting councils through the process; panel members could visit the council to explain the scheme and accreditation process; one member, who plays no role in the accreditation process, could mentor the council through the process of meeting the standards; the panel

could interview the clerk and a number of councillors, in person or by phone, to ensure the quality of the submission.

- The county accreditation panel secretary or a designated panel member could prepare a report for the panel, rating the submission against the criteria, and identifying any areas which need further exploration.
- There could be a "pre-panel" element of the scheme where councils are required to provide links to information on their websites, which is then checked by the CAP secretary.
- There should be a clearer process for appointing and training panel members.
- Panel meetings and decision making should be more open and transparent; there should be a right of appeal against a panel decision.
- It could be useful to have some written guidance for county associations and accreditation panels on how to get principal authorities involved in the scheme
- Marketing of the scheme is a problem - could all clerks who obtain CiLCA be targeted with a suggestion of Quality Status as the next step?
- The fees for Quality Status should realistically reflect the cost of running the scheme
- Travel expenses for accreditation panel members should be covered by the scheme
- Some areas have a 'quality council charter' with principal authorities in the area, although it is not clear how effective this is in raising awareness

In addition, one county association response was primarily concerned with whether the scheme should continue to include a requirement to use the national terms and conditions of employment for clerks. The submission made it clear that the county association was very opposed to the inclusion of this requirement. The issue was mentioned in one other submission from a county association, which said that although the clerk should have a written contract, they did not feel it necessarily had to meet the national terms and conditions.

One county association also sent in some suggestions for new accreditation criteria. This is attached for reference as Appendix A.

### Respondents from local councils
- There should be some provision for the scheme to recognise prior qualifications, in addition to CiLCA
- How does the scheme related to other quality schemes: Investors in People, ISO standards, ACRE standards etc
- Signs that a council may not be performing well should also be taken into account when accreditation decisions are made
- An online self-assessment tool for councils looking to achieve Quality Status would be very useful
- It is a problem that you can pass all the tests to be a 'quality council' and actually be breaking the law in areas not covered by the tests

### Principal councils
- It can be politically difficult in practice for principal councils to differentiate between quality councils and others - particularly as there are not many quality councils

- If Quality Status was clearly a sign of proper links into the community and good engagement then it would be more relevant to principal councils
- It could also be more attractive to principal councils if it was an indicator of capacity, of ability to manage finance, of councillor involvement and professional standards of employee relations, and not just of the quality of the clerk
- A key issue for principal councils; does the local council fully understand its legal responsibilities both as an employer and in terms of contracts
- Principal councils want to know - is the council open for business? A scheme which showed previous evidence of project management and service delivery would be of interest
- It is important to see evidence that councils are willing to budget and precept in order to adequately meet the needs of their community
- Some evidence that the council has a strategic plan - and an engagement with the plan for the wider area, even if they disagree
- Some evidence that councillors are trained and committed to doing things properly
- If principal authorities are to be more involved it will be up county associations in the relevant area to make the links, build relationships and explain value of the scheme
- Different players in principal councils will have different drivers for involvement in the scheme – members will see things differently to officers

## Appendix 1: suggested accreditation criteria

Democracy
- No. of nominations and number of seats at last ordinary election
- Minutes of three consecutive meetings indicating public attendance and time set aside for public questions
- Evidence of adoption of Code of Conduct
- Evidence of regular reviews of Registers of Interest

Qualifications
- Does Clerk have CiLCA ? (minimum requirement to qualify)
- Percentage of individual councillors trained by the County Association or receiving other relevant training in past year
- Training budget as percentage of staffing budget

Meetings
- 3 consecutive meeting agendas and minutes (do agendas specify the business to be transacted, is only that business transacted, are declaration of interest made and dispensations granted, are agendas supported by budget forecasts, are the public/press excluded appropriately)
- 3 consecutive public notices of meetings (3 clear days notice, business to be transacted, public invited to attend).

Finance
- Regular budget review at each meeting, including reference to bank account
- Audit Reports (internal and external) publicly available and reported to Council
- List of cheque signatories (Clerk should not be a signatory)
- PAYE Reference No.
- Copy of latest VAT Claim
- 3 year future financial forecast
- Evidence of annual review of Council's major risks

Policies
- Evidence of adoption or annual review of key and statutory policies (Health & Safety, Equality, Disciplinary, Grievance, Absence as a minimum)
- Evidence of adoption or annual review of Standing Orders and Financial Regulations
- Copies of risk assessments for council meetings, and one other council function
- Evidence of Adoption of Model Publication Scheme
- Evidence of Clerk's contract including statutory statement of particulars (not necessarily the NALC model)

Community Consultation/Involvement
- Evidence of website to minimum standard
- Evidence of other community engagement meetings or questionnaires
- Evidence of adoption of complaints procedure
- Evidence of council review of any complaints, or if delegated, an annual review of types of complaints received
- Evidence of responses to national or local consultations within past year.