WHITE COLNE PARISH COUNCIL

White Colne Village Hall, Bures Road, White Colne, CO6 2QA.

https://whitecolneparishcouncil.gov.uk/

clerk@whitecolneparishcouncil.gov.uk

Village of the Year 2025
Community and Voluntary Group Award 2026

BACKGROUND PAPER – 17.11.2026

Please note supporting information regarding the following Agenda items:

8vi FINANCE: Budget 2027-28

The council's budget vs expenditure is published at Appendix G to the Agenda.

In addition, Appendix F details the precept requirements of all parishes in Braintree District. It is clear that smaller parishes, usually without other income streams, often need to request higher figures from their residents (Wickham St Paul, Ridgewell, Bures Hamlet, Panfield, for example). Without income from the Village Hall, White Colne would likely need £28-30,000 to cover its expenditure.

Although White Colne finished 2025-26 with a balance of £23,365, grant funding of £14,995 had been received. The council's general reserve was therefore in the region of £8,000 at year end – roughly enough to meet its expenditure for six months. White Colne runs a tight budget and funds much of its work in the community through available grants, but there is little leeway for spending on items and projects which may arise. The expected expenditure of £1,500-£3,000 on necessary tree works, as an example, will have a detrimental effect on the council's year-end figure and its general reserve.

It is therefore recommended that White Colne requests a precept of £75 at Band D in 2027-28. This will increase the commitment from a Band D property by £13.62 and will be mediated to parishioners as a 22.2% increase. The cost to parishioners in Band D properties equals £6.25 per month over 12 months. It should be noted that the mediation of precept increases in percentage terms is incredibly unhelpful to smaller parishes.

Whilst tax rises are never particularly welcome, £75 would still be below the average figure requested by Braintree parishes (see Table 3). It is anticipated that an increase of such a size would be a one-off that would rebalance the council's general reserve and that future precept increases could be kept <4.99%.

White Colne is an active parish that deeply cares for its residents and supports those most in need, as has been evidenced by two successful awards in as many years. The recommended precept increase would enable the council to continue its work both *in* and *for* the community.

11v LEISURE & FACILITIES: Allotments water use

The 2026-27 budget set for WCVH water has been exceeded at end of Q2 (budget: £750, actual: £1,090). Water use at the Allotments site also caused Anglian Water to get in touch about a suspected leak.

It appears that it is possible to levy a one-off annual charge for water use to allotment plot holders without the need to give a year's notice. The council can therefore consider whether it wishes to enact such a scheme and, if so, what the charge should be.

12i GOVERNANCE: Local Council Award Scheme (see NALC.gov.uk)

WHY SHOULD YOU APPLY

Engaging in the Local Council Award Scheme (LCAS) offers numerous advantages for parish and town councils. For those councils already confident in their high-performance standards, the scheme verifies them, affirming that they are contemporary and progressive according to sector benchmarks. For those aspiring to enhance their operations, it provides a structured framework to initiate and plan the initial stages of improvement, fostering increased performance and confidence. Establishing policies for continuous development becomes a key outcome, aiding councils in their pursuit of excellence.

Winning the award becomes a celebration for councillors and officers alike. It is a tangible acknowledgement and respect for their unwavering commitment and hard work.

Beyond the internal benefits, the award becomes a valuable tool for parish and town councils when collaborating with the local community or other partners. It instils confidence in these stakeholders, assuring them that the council operates at a national professional standard and is dedicated to delivering quality services.

The scheme's impact extends to the national reputation of parish and town councils, showcasing their achievements and commitment to continuous improvement. This contributes significantly to building a positive image of councils on a broader scale.

WHAT AWARD LEVEL TO APPLY FOR

We offer a structured framework designed to recognise and promote excellence among parish and town councils of all sizes. These awards – the Bronze Award, the Silver Award, and the Gold Award – provide a clear pathway for councils to demonstrate their commitment to high standards of governance, community engagement, and continuous improvement.

Bronze Award

The Bronze Award is tailored for councils aiming to showcase their adherence to essential standards, ensuring effective delivery for their communities. Achieving this award necessitates the council demonstrating that it possesses the necessary documentation and information to operate lawfully and in accordance with established practices. Furthermore, the council must have policies in place for training its councillors and officers, laying the groundwork for future improvement and development initiatives.

This award serves as a benchmark for evaluating your council's performance. It challenges you to meet the minimum standards and prompts thoughtful consideration of ongoing development and improvement. It provides a structured framework for councils to establish a solid foundation, fostering a commitment to excellence in their operations.

Silver Award

The attainment of the Silver Award signifies that a council excels in governance, community engagement, and continuous improvement. Distinguished by going beyond mere legal obligations, quality councils emerge as leaders within their communities, consistently seeking opportunities to enhance and develop further.

To secure the Silver Award, a council not only fulfils all the requisites of the Bronze Award but also provides additional evidence showcasing exemplary governance, effective community engagement, and notable council improvement initiatives. Given the elevated level of this accomplishment, a council bestowed with the Silver Award may also qualify to exercise the general power of competence, underscoring its commitment to exceptional standards and proactive leadership.

Gold Award

The prestigious Gold Award signifies that a council stands at the pinnacle of best practices, attaining excellence in governance, community leadership, and council development. Distinguished by their forward-thinking approach, Gold Award councils not only provide exemplary leadership for their communities but also foster unity, exhibit outstanding business planning processes ensuring optimal value for money, and consistently pursue innovative solutions and opportunities for improvement.

These councils serve as beacons of the highest standards achievable within our sector, showcasing the epitome of what can be accomplished for our communities. The Gold Award represents their unwavering commitment to exceptional performance and continuous advancement.

HOW TO APPLY

The first step is to register online. We will then charge a small registration fee. You do not need to have all the criteria in place at this stage. You are simply registering your interest in taking part in the scheme. You can apply for any award level (i.e. you don't need to start with the Bronze Award). Once your criteria are prepared and in order, you confirm this in a public meeting. You then notify your local accreditation panel coordinator (either us or your local county association) and provide the application form, including relevant documents and online links. An accreditation fee will be payable once an award has been achieved. County associations that manage their local panels may have differing fee timelines, so please check with your local accreditation panel coordinator.

Fees: * Please note all figures exclude VAT. There are two fees:

- A registration fee is paid to the National Association of Local Councils
- An accreditation fee is paid to the organisation responsible for administering the local or regional accreditation process.

Registration fee: The registration fee (£50*) is paid to the National Association of Local Councils by all councils for each level, regardless of size.

Accreditation fee: The accreditation fee varies according to the award applied for, the council's income and the council's accreditation history. The accreditation fee covers the cost of the accreditation panel decision-making process only. County associations may charge additional advice, training, or application support costs. Those services and fees will be determined locally. The Improvement and Development Board will review fee levels annually. The fee is reduced by 20% if the council sought accreditation at a lower level within the previous 12 months, as the checking process covering criteria in the prior award requires less work.

Bronze Award:

- Annual income under £25,000 — £50*
- Annual income over £25,000 — £80*

Silver Award:

- Annual income under £25,000 — £80*
- Annual income over £25,000 — £100*

Gold Award:

- Annual income under £25,000 — £100*
- Annual income over £25,000 — £200*

The figures quoted are the discounted rates for NALC members. Both the registration fee and accreditation fee are reduced by 50% for member councils. Non-member councils must pay the full fee, i.e. double the figures quoted above.

The national panel has dates for three different rounds throughout the year.

WHAT HAPPENS AFTER BEING ACCREDITED

The Local Council Award Scheme (LCAS) promotes high standards in parish and town councils by recognising excellence in governance, community engagement, and service delivery. The parish and town council's accreditation under the scheme met criteria across three award levels: Bronze, Silver, and Gold. To promote their accreditation, parish and town councils can:

- Give us feedback on the scheme — Completing our feedback form will help ensure the scheme continues to evolve and grow.
- Use our LCAS logos — Download our logos for the different award levels. These can be used on letterhead, website footers or email signatures.
- Nominate for the Star Council Awards — Consider nominating the council, councillors, and clerk for our Star Council Awards to celebrate your work and raise the profile of parish and town councils.
- Issue a press release — Issue press releases and engage with local media to highlight your success.
- Communication channels — Publicise your achievement in newsletters, websites, and social media to inform residents.

- Best practices — Share best practices with other parish or town councils and participate in peer learning.
- Inform your local MPs and principal authority — Send formal notifications to MPs and principal authorities about the accreditation, highlighting the council's commitment to excellence.
- Internal announcement — Share the news through internal communications, such as emails or meetings.
- Celebration — Organise a celebratory event or meeting to acknowledge everyone's contribution to achieving the accreditation.

ASSESSMENT PANELS

Our national and local assessment panels play a crucial role in the accreditation process for parish and town councils nationwide. This process ensures that councils meet high governance and community engagement standards. Our approach involves collaboration between experienced councillors, county associations and clerks, all dedicated to enhancing the quality and effectiveness of parish and town councils.

National panels: Our national assessment panels comprise a large team of seasoned councillors and clerks from parish and town councils. These volunteers are essential in assessing applications for the accreditation scheme, bringing their expertise and insight to the process. After the panels complete their assessment, they provide valuable feedback to the councils, guiding them toward improvement and excellence. Every application undergoes a preliminary review by our Triage Team before the panel assessments. This light-touch review identifies potential issues early on and offers councils constructive feedback to refine their submissions. Parish and town councils then have the opportunity to revise and improve their applications before the final assessment by the national panel.

Local panels: In some regions, county associations operate their local assessment panels independently of the national panel scheme we manage. Please check with your county association if you are unsure whether it participates in the national scheme. Alternatively, you can contact us directly at localcouncilawardscheme@nalc.gov.uk.

Reporting results: County associations operating local panels must report their accreditation results to receive the award certificate. The coordinated efforts of national and local assessment panels are integral to the success of the accreditation process, supporting parish and town councils in achieving and maintaining high standards.

12iv GOVERNANCE: Parish Elections May 2027

In anticipation of the parish council elections scheduled for May 2027, the Agenda for the meeting to be held on 19th January 2027 will include an item asking members to confirm their intention to stand (or otherwise) as candidates. *This* item is to let members know to expect it…