Shield of Honour 2026
Question Set and Marking Scheme

Background

This marking scheme relates to the written application component of the 2026 Shield of Honour scheme. The final marks for each submission will be determined by reference to applicants' performance in the written application only. The results of the Five Star Audit process will not be considered other than as a right of entry to the awards.

Please note that the marking descriptors are indicative by nature. For example, two organisations may adopt differing approaches to the written application and score equally well. Nonetheless, high-scoring organisation will typically answer all aspects of the question, clearly following the marking scheme, provide site-specific references (evidenced and referenced through the audit report) and fully utilise, but not exceed the specified word allowance per response.

Scoring criteria

- A maximum of 60 marks are available for the written application. Applicants must score a minimum of 45 marks to remain eligible for the award.
- A minimum of two individual responses must be scored within the top mark band (11-15 marks).
- Submissions will become ineligible for the Shield of Honour award should any individual responses be scored within the lower mark band (0-5 marks).
- Responses to each sub-question must not exceed 750 words per sub-question (i.e. 3,000 words overall per submission).
- The two optional questions for the Innovation and Development award will be marked separately by a panel. The grades for these questions will not be included in the overall score of the main application.

A sample number of applicants will be randomly selected to validate the responses given on their application in a virtual interview. This selection will be made following the application submission deadline on 14 September 2026, and the selected applicants will be notified with a Microsoft Teams placeholder invite for the week beginning on 28 September 2026

		11-15 marks	6-10 marks	0-5 marks
1.	**With relevant reference to the outcomes from your recent Five Star Wellbeing Audit, explain how information obtained through monitoring work-related ill health, including mental health factors, is used to influence wellbeing strategy and objectives.**	• A full explanation of how information obtained through monitoring work-related ill health, including mental health factors, is analysed and used to influence wellbeing strategy and objectives. • The response is supported by a range of relevant monitoring processes and clear examples showing how findings, trends and risk factors have shaped strategic priorities, objectives, programmes, controls or resources. • All examples are clearly linked to relevant outcomes from the recent Five Star Wellbeing Audit.	• An adequate explanation of how monitoring information relating to work-related ill health, including mental health factors, is used to influence wellbeing strategy or objectives. • The response includes at least one relevant monitoring process and an example of a finding influencing a strategic priority, objective or programme. • All or most examples are linked to outcomes from the recent Five Star Wellbeing Audit.	• A basic outline of how monitoring information may influence wellbeing strategy or objectives. • The response provides little or no detail about monitoring processes, analysis, trends or how findings lead to changes in priorities or action. • Few or no examples are linked to outcomes from the recent Five Star Wellbeing Audit.
2.	**With relevant reference to the outcomes from your recent Five Star Wellbeing Audit, describe how the organisation integrates the financial costs, benefits and investment requirements associated with wellbeing into business processes and decision-making.**	• A full description of how the organisation integrates the financial costs, benefits and investment requirements associated with wellbeing into business planning, budgeting, procurement, project approval and other relevant decision-making processes. • The response explains how financial and non-financial evidence is considered, how investment proposals are evaluated and how benefits or outcomes are tracked. • Clear examples show when and how this is done, and all examples are linked to relevant outcomes from the recent Five Star Wellbeing Audit.	• An adequate description of how financial considerations associated with wellbeing are incorporated into business processes and decision-making. • The response includes at least one clear example of when or how costs, benefits or investment requirements are considered, but lacks depth or breadth. • All or most examples are linked to outcomes from the recent Five Star Wellbeing Audit.	• A basic description of how financial considerations associated with wellbeing may be considered in business decisions. • The response provides only a limited example and does not clearly explain the relevant process, evidence, ownership or evaluation of outcomes. • Few or no examples are linked to outcomes from the recent Five Star Wellbeing Audit.

3.	**With relevant reference to the outcomes from your recent Five Star Wellbeing Audit, identify the most significant audit outcomes for your organisation and explain how relevant recommendations will be used to ensure longer-term continual improvement in wellbeing performance.**	• A full explanation of how the organisation identifies the most significant audit outcomes and determines which recommendations are relevant to its context, risks, workforce and strategic priorities. • The response provides clear examples of the methods used to assess significance and relevance and of planned or completed actions that will drive longer-term continual improvement and post-audit value. • All examples are clearly linked to outcomes from the recent Five Star Wellbeing Audit.	• An adequate explanation of how significant audit outcomes and relevant recommendations are identified and used to drive continual improvement in wellbeing performance. • The response includes at least one example of the method used to determine relevance and one planned or completed action that provides post-audit value. • All or most examples are linked to outcomes from the recent Five Star Wellbeing Audit.	• A basic description of significant audit outcomes or recommendations, with limited explanation of how significance or relevance was determined. • The response is not supported by clear examples of the approach used to deliver longer-term continual improvement or post-audit value. • Few or no examples are linked to outcomes from the recent Five Star Wellbeing Audit.
4.	**With relevant reference to the outcomes from your recent Five Star Wellbeing Audit, explain how the organisation will use the audit output to positively impact and improve wellbeing performance and associated organisational culture during the next year.**	• A full explanation clearly demonstrating how wellbeing performance will be improved both operationally and culturally during the next year. • The response provides a range of relevant campaigns, programmes or initiatives that will drive focused performance improvement and cultural engagement, together with clear ownership, milestones and measures. • Measures may include employee engagement surveys, absence and ill-health data, participation levels, feedback forums, programme outcomes, stakeholder feedback and appropriate external benchmarking. All examples are linked to the recent Five Star Wellbeing Audit and clearly focused on the next year.	• An adequate explanation of how wellbeing performance and culture will be improved during the next year. • The response includes a range of relevant campaigns, programmes or initiatives and some reference to ownership, timescales or performance and cultural measures. • All or most examples are linked to outcomes from the recent Five Star Wellbeing Audit.	• A basic explanation of how wellbeing performance or culture may be improved. • Few relevant campaigns, programmes or initiatives are identified, with little or no reference to measures, ownership, milestones or cultural engagement. • There is no clear focus on the next year, and few or no examples are linked to outcomes from the recent Five Star Wellbeing Audit.