

HEDNESFORD TOWN COUNCIL
BUSINESS RISK REVIEW
MARCH 2025

Statement of Principles

The standards expected of all public services are honesty, impartiality, openness, accountability, accuracy, fairness, integrity, transparency, objectivity, and reliability. All should be carried out in the spirit of, as well as to the letter of the law, in the public interest, to high ethical standards and achieving value for money.

1. Meetings

Any financial matter requiring a decision (apart from routine/day to day business of the Council) should only be considered where the information provided clearly identifies the financial implications of the decision and the consequences of not approving the decision.

Recommendation and Current practice

Information to be made available prior to the relevant meeting and for members to bring such papers to the relevant Committee Meeting and subsequent Council meeting. Any proposals agreed to be minuted for audit purposes.

2. Financial Regulations

Last review June 2024.

Recommendation

Annual review of the regulations required to ensure they are fit for purpose and up to date.

3. Standing Orders

The Council's Standing Orders were updated in May 2024.

Recommendation

Annual review of standing orders required.

4. Financial Systems

- a. The Financial Regulations adopted are based on those provided by the National Association of Local Councils and updated in June 2024.
- b. Sales and Purchases are recorded in SCRIBE and updated on a regular basis. SCRIBE system is used for year-end reporting and the AGAR return.
- c. All payments are prepared by the RFO (or Chief Officer if RFO unavailable).
- d. All payments are approved by the Chair or Deputy Chair or FPOPS Chair prior to raising. Where available, on-line authorisation is required via two

Councillors. Items of exceptional expenditure agreed at full council as per item one.

- e. Exceptions to part d. are items required under emergency powers in order to
 - i) emergency repairs to enable the Pye Green Community Centre open
 - ii) other general Council matters that would otherwise restrict the Council from conducting its business. These payments will be detailed and highlighted by the RFO for approval as stated in (d) above.
- f. Payments are presented for authorisation after the RFO is satisfied of their validity and the Chief Officer has approved them. Exceptions will only apply if payments are required when the Chief Officer is absent.
- g. Bank statements to be reconciled monthly and signed off by RFO and Chief Officer. Twice yearly, the reconciliation is to be checked by chair of Finance, Operations and Personnel Committee.

Recommendation

The Council and its officers must comply with the agreed Financial Regulations at all times. No cash payments to be made. No cash receipts to be taken. Any exceptions are to be agreed by council and documented.

5. Model Code of Conduct

The Model Code of Conduct was adopted in April 2002. An updated Code of Conduct was agreed in May 2023. Review date April 2025. Register of Interests should be declared if appropriate at all Council Meetings and Committee Meetings.

Recommendation

All Councillors' must be aware of the implications of the Code. Every Member must consider all Agenda items to ensure they declare an interest in a particular matter.

6. Retention of Officers

The impact of resignations on the organisation by Officers. Impacting day to day operations and also, longer term plans of the organisation to be considered.

Recommendation

Business continuity plan to be drawn up and put in place based on officer role. Consideration needs to be given on impact upon the organisation short term and long term on Hednesford Town Council continuity of operation.

7. Pandemic / Global or Local disaster planning

The impact of any future pandemic, global or local disaster needs to be considered in the risk register for the Community Centre, Town, Community and on the running of the Town Council itself.

Recommendation

Needs to be included in all risk registers and the business continuity plan.

8. Internal Monitoring

The Council has employed an Independent Internal Auditor and an External Auditor to carry out the duties required by the 'Lighter Touch' Audit Regulations.

Recommendation

That a competent independent internal auditor to be appointed to review the year-end accounts to ensure accuracy and compliance with the Financial Regulations. Quotes are to be provided by RFO in advance of year end at FPOPS committee meeting. Approval to be sought via full council for the recommendation from FPOPS for auditor appointment. Current auditor approved for 3 years from 2024 25 to 2026 27

9. Security Risk

Cyber Security and Fraud. Stringent policy required for use of IT. Cyber Security Software to be regularly reviewed via provider. Processes for authorisation of payments to be agreed and adhered to.

Recommendation

A formal IT usage policy to be put in place and agreed to by officers/users. Cyber Security controls to be reviewed (minimum annually). Official e-mails to be used only. Physical controls for sensitive paperwork to be reviewed annually by Chief Officer / Responsible Finance Officer.

10. Freedom of Information

Access to the documents defined in the Model Code adopted by the Council on 26 November 2002, will be made available upon request. Provision of such information is free of charge unless estimated time limit exceeds 18 hrs of officer time. Charges for providing such information will apply where the time limit is expected to exceed for officer(s) to provide same, at a cost of £25 per hour. A notice providing details of the Council's obligations under the Freedom of Information Act to be displayed on the website and available via PGCC office.

Recommendation

Review of notices available on website and at the HTC office regarding FOI requests.

11. Insurance Provision

The Council's insurance provision will be reviewed annually to ensure that the Council retains adequate insurance cover against:

Public liability

Loss/damage of assets

Fidelity

Recommendation

Continuation of review of policy on renewal, level of insurance and cost of Insurance. Assets to be added where appropriate to policy at least half yearly.

12. Training

Training must be kept under continual review and needs identified by officers and councillors met where appropriate.

Recommendation

Those Members who wish to attend training courses are given the opportunity within budgeted restraints where possible. Staff Training to be identified by Chief Officer following one-to-one review or job role changes. To be provided within budgetary restraints where possible.

13. Holiday and Sickness Cover

No provision is currently in place to cover staff absence in relation to sickness, accident or holiday. The Clerk will arrange annual leave so that where possible, it does not coincide with attendance at full Council Meetings. This does not include late changes to council meeting dates where holidays have already been agreed. Agendas must be issued 5 days before each meeting. Apologies for non-attendance should be received in a timely manner. Meeting papers will not be issued unless specifically requested.

Staff cover needs to be available at Pye Green Community Centre as required. Up to seven days a week, to make sure that cleaning/caretaking duties are undertaken together with administration of bookings and facilities management.

Recommendation

Formal arrangements for sickness and holiday cover need to be put in place to cover the officer roles where needed.

Formal arrangements for sickness and holiday cover need to be put in place to cover caretaking responsibilities and administration of bookings at the Community Centre. Recruitment of the Pye Green Officer should alleviate some of these issues going forward.

14. Grant Funding

The Council has a small budget for supporting local groups and charities.

The procedure for awarding donations should be documented in a policy. It should contain:

- Eligibility criteria (i.e. must be a registered charity or not for profit local community group, or individual living in Hednesford and doing something good on a voluntary basis which raises the profile of the town)
- The frequency of consideration of applications (i.e. annually, half yearly, quarterly and particularly near to the end of the financial year when all applications have been submitted and all money can be spent without having to consider leaving a contingency for emergencies),
- A procedure for dealing with emergency applications (eligibility criteria i.e. groups which are in urgent need of revenue funding).
- Publicity - Informing groups/charities of the opportunity to apply (i.e. advertising in the press),
- How priorities are determined (the order of priority for the groups chosen)

- Method for determination of the monetary values to be awarded (i.e. applicants should submit costings of projects)
- Monitoring of the use to which the donations are put and completion of Grant Feedback Form to monitor project outcomes and the final spend for the project.
- Application forms both for applications and an emergency application form for groups which are in urgent need of revenue funding.

Recommendation

To ensure that all grants awarded follow the application and feedback process. That the grants awarded are agreed prior to communication of the award and any grant payment is made. Grants awarded must not exceed budgeted value unless additional funding is identified and agreed at full council. Agreed grants and details of payee's to be provided to RFO prior to year end for payments to be made before 31st March.

15. Data Protection

Hednesford Town Council requires updated data protection statement to ensure measures are in place and visible to protect sensitive data.

Recommendation

Data protection policy review needs to be undertaken to determine controls needed to be updated and adopted to control access to sensitive data. Councillors and Officers need to undertake data protection on-line training / refresher training on a regular basis. Recommended every two years.

16. Health and Safety

By law, a council must have a Health and Safety Policy if it employs five or more staff. In practice all councils benefit from understanding the requirements of Health and Safety legislation. It protects staff, service users and members of the public in addition to protecting the Council against insurance claims made against it.

Recommendation

To formulate a Health and Safety Policy. Publish on the website and in the Community Centre for information.

17. Equal Opportunities and Diversity Policy

Legislation protects against discrimination and harassment. The best councils publish an equal opportunities statement which benefits service users, members of the public and employees. Hednesford Town Council need to ensure their commitment to the promotion of equality of opportunity and treatment.

Recommendation

To formulate and adopt an Equal Opportunities Policy. Publish statement and details on the website and in the Community Centre. Policy put in place February 2024. To be reviewed by February 2026.

18. Complaints Procedure

The Council should establish procedures by which members of the public and service users can register complaints. People must be confident that the complaint will be dealt

with quickly and positively. It is important to get the circumstances of the complaint in writing (although some people will need help with this).

Recommendation

Feedback forms are provided for Pye Green Community Centre for any reviews of hire / venue usage to be completed by Staff. General complaints procedure reviewed September 2024 under Abusive, persistent, vexatious complaints policy. Review date September 2026.