



Hockliffe Parish Council

FINANCIAL REGULATIONS POLICY

GENERAL

These financial regulations govern the conduct of the financial transactions of the Council and may only be amended or varied by resolution of the Council.

The Responsible Financial Officer (RFO), under the policy direction of the Council, shall be responsible for the proper administration of the Council's affairs. For Hockliffe Parish Council (The Council) the RFO is the Clerk.

The Finance Committee shall be elected members of the Council. Under the direction of the Council, they shall be responsible for monitoring the Council's expenditure against its annual estimates.

The RFO shall be responsible for the production of financial management information.

The Council shall be responsible for ensuring that the financial management is adequate and effective and that the council has a system of internal controls which facilitates the effective exercise of its functions and which manages risk.

The Council shall review at least once a year the effectiveness of its systems of internal controls and shall produce a statement on internal control with its statement of accounts

ANNUAL ESTIMATES

The Finance Committee formulate and submit proposals to the Council in respect of revenue and capital costs for the following financial year not later than the end of October each year.

Detailed estimates of all receipts and payments for the year shall be prepared each year by the RFO.

The Council shall review the estimates not later than the end of December each year and shall fix the Precept to be levied for the ensuing financial year. The RFO shall supply each member with a copy of the approved estimates.

The annual budgets shall form the basis of financial control for the ensuing year.

The Council shall prepare and have regard to a three year forecast of Revenue and Capital Receipts and Payments which shall be prepared at the same time as the annual Budget or Estimates.

BUDGETARY CONTROL

Expenditure on revenue items may be incurred up to the amounts included in the approved budget.

Expenditure may be incurred which will exceed the amount provided in the revenue budget provided that the total reserves for the year do not fall below one third of the value of the annual precept and only with the agreement of the Council. The RFO may, with the approval of Council, vire between subheads.

The RFO shall regularly provide the Finance Committee with a statement of receipts and payments to date under each head of the budgets, comparing actual expenditure against that planned on a quarterly basis.

The RFO may incur expenditure on behalf of the Council which is necessary to carry out any repair replacement or other work which is of such extreme urgency that it must be done at once, whether or not there is any budgetary provision for the expenditure, subject to a limit of £500. The RFO shall report the action to the Council as soon as practicable thereafter.

Unspent provisions in the revenue budget may be carried forward to a subsequent year.

No expenditure shall be incurred in relation to any capital project and no contract entered into or tender accepted involving capital expenditure unless the Council is satisfied that the necessary funds are available, or the requisite borrowing approval has been obtained.

All capital works shall be administered in accordance with the Council's standing orders and financial regulations relating to contracts.

ACCOUNTING AND AUDIT

All accounting procedures and financial records of the Council shall be determined by the RFO as required by the Accounts and Audit Regulations 1996 as amended.

The RFO shall be responsible for completing the annual financial statements of the Council as soon as practicable after the end of the financial year and shall submit them and report thereon to the Council.

The RFO shall be responsible for completing the Accounts of the Council contained in the Annual Return (as supplied by the Auditor appointed from time to time by the Audit Commission) and for submitting the Annual Return for approval and authorisation by the Council within the timescale set by the Accounts and Audit Regulations 1996 as amended, or set by the Auditor.

The RFO shall be responsible for ensuring that there is adequate and effective system of internal audit of the Council's accounting, financial and other operations in accordance with Regulation 5 of the Accounts and Audit Regulations 1996 as amended. Any officer or member of the Council shall, if the RFO or Internal Auditor requires, make available such documents of the Council which appear to the RFO or Internal Auditor to be necessary for the purpose of the internal audit and shall supply the RFO or Internal Auditor with such information and explanation as the RFO or Internal Auditor considers necessary for that purpose.

The Internal Auditor shall carry out the work required by the RFO, or by the Council, with a view to satisfactory completion of the Internal Auditor's Report section of the Annual Return as compiled annually by the Audit Commission. The Internal Auditor, who shall be competent and independent of the operations of the Council, shall report to Council in writing on a regular basis with a minimum of one annual report in respect of each financial year.

The RFO shall make arrangements for the opportunity for inspection of the accounts, books, and vouchers required by Audit Commission Act 1998 section 15 and the Accounts and Audit Regulations 1996 as amended.

The RFO shall, as soon as practicable, bring to the attention of all councillors any correspondence or report from the Internal or External Auditor, unless the correspondence is of a purely administrative matter.

BANKING ARRANGEMENTS AND CHEQUES

The Council's banking arrangements shall be made by the RFO and approved by the Council. They shall be regularly reviewed for efficiency.

A schedule of the payments required, forming part of the Agenda for the Meeting, shall be prepared by the RFO and, together with the relevant invoices, be presented to Council. If the schedule is in order it shall be authorised by a resolution of the Council. If more appropriate the detail may be shown in the Minutes of the Meeting.

Cheques drawn on the bank account in accordance with the schedule referred to in paragraph 5.2 or in accordance with paragraph 6.4, shall be signed by two members of Council.

PAYMENT OF ACCOUNTS

All payments shall be effected by cheque or other order drawn on the Council's bankers.

All invoices for payment shall be examined, verified and certified by the RFO. The RFO shall satisfy him/herself that the work, goods or services to which the invoice relates shall have been received, carried out, examined and approved.

The RFO shall examine invoices in relation to arithmetic accuracy and shall analyse them to the appropriate expenditure heading. The RFO shall take all steps to settle all invoices submitted, and which are in order, at the next available Council Meeting.

If a payment is necessary to avoid a charge to interest under the Late Payment of Commercial Debts (Interest) Act 1998, and the due date for payment is before the next scheduled Meeting of Council, where the RFO certifies that there is no dispute or other reason to delay payment, the RFO may (notwithstanding para 6.3) take all steps necessary to settle such invoices provided that a list of such payments shall be submitted to the next appropriate meeting of Council.

The Council will not maintain any form of cash float. All cash received must be banked intact. Any payments made in cash by the RFO (for example for postage or minor stationery items) shall be refunded on a regular basis, at least quarterly.

INCOME

The collection of all sums due to the Council shall be the responsibility of and under the supervision of the RFO.

Particulars of all charges to be made for work done, services rendered or goods supplied shall be agreed annually by the Council, notified to the RFO and the RFO shall be responsible for the collection of all accounts due to the Council.

The Council will review all fees and charges annually, following a report of the Treasurer.

Any sums found to be irrecoverable and any bad debts shall be reported to the Council and shall be written off in the year.

All sums received on behalf of the Council shall be banked intact as directed by the RFO. In all cases, all receipts shall be deposited with the Council's bankers with such frequency as the RFO considers necessary.

The origin of each receipt shall be entered on the paying-in slip.

Personal cheques shall not be cashed out of money held on behalf of the Council.

The RFO shall promptly complete any VAT Return that is required. Any repayment claim due in accordance with VAT Act 1994 section 33 shall be made at least annually coinciding with the financial year end.

Where any significant sums of cash are regularly received by the Council, the RFO shall take such steps as are agreed by the Council to ensure that more than one person is present when the cash is counted in the first instance, that there is a reconciliation to some form of control such as ticket issues, and that appropriate care is taken in the security and safety of individuals banking such cash.

ORDERS FOR WORK, GOODS AND SERVICES

An official order or letter shall be issued for all work, goods and services unless a formal contract is to be prepared or an official order would be inappropriate. Copies of orders shall be retained.

Order books shall be controlled by the RFO.

The Parish Council is responsible for obtaining value for money at all times. A Councillor issuing an official order is to ensure as far as reasonable and practicable that the best available terms are obtained in respect of each transaction, usually by obtaining three or more quotations or estimates from appropriate suppliers, subject to any *de minimis* provisions in Regulation 11 (l) below.

Notwithstanding 10.3, the Parish Council is not obliged to accept the lowest priced quotation or tender. It should take into account the company's trading history and reliability, and any other factors that it deems relevant. (See also 11 i below).

The RFO shall verify the lawful nature of any proposed purchase before the issue of any order, and in the case of new or infrequent purchases or payments, the RFO shall ensure that the statutory authority shall be reported to the meeting at which the order is approved so that the Minutes can record the power being used.

CONTRACTS

Procedures as to contracts are laid down as follows:

Every contract shall comply with these financial regulations, and no exceptions shall be made otherwise than in an emergency provided that these regulations shall not apply to contracts which relate to items (i) to (vi) below:

- for the supply of gas, electricity, water, sewerage and telephone services;
- for specialist services such as are provided by solicitors, accountants, surveyors and planning consultants;
- for work to be executed or goods or materials to be supplied which consist of repairs to or parts for existing machinery or equipment or plant;
- for work to be executed or goods or materials to be supplied which constitute an extension of an existing contract by the Council;
- for additional audit work of the external Auditor up to an estimated value of £250 (in excess of this sum the RFO shall act after consultation with the Chairman and Vice Chairman of Council);
- for goods or materials proposed to be purchased which are proprietary articles and/or are only sold at a fixed price.

Where it is intended to enter into a contract exceeding £20,000 in value for the supply of goods or materials or for the execution of works or specialist services other than such goods, materials, works or specialist services as are excepted as set out in paragraph (a) the RFO shall invite tenders from at least three firms to be taken from the appropriate list approved by the Council.

When applications are made to waive financial regulations relating to contracts to enable a price to be negotiated without competition the reason shall be embodied in a recommendation to the Council.

Such invitation to tender shall state the general nature of the intended contract and the RFO shall obtain the necessary technical assistance to prepare a specification in appropriate cases. The invitation shall in addition state that tenders must be addressed to the RFO in the ordinary course of post. Each tendering firm shall be supplied with a specifically marked envelope in which the tender is to be sealed and remain sealed until the prescribed date for opening tenders for that contract.

It follows from 2.5 above that all tenders must state three year costs.

All sealed tenders shall be opened at the same time on the prescribed date by the RFO in the presence of at least one member of Council.

If less than three tenders are received for contracts above £20,000 or if all the tenders are identical the Council may make such arrangements as it thinks fit for procuring the goods or materials or executing the works.

When it is to enter into a contract less than £20,000 in value for the supply of goods or materials or for the execution of works or specialist services other than such goods, materials, works or specialist services as are excepted as set out in paragraph (a) the RFO shall obtain 3 quotations (priced descriptions of the proposed supply); where the value is below £1,000 and above £250 the RFO shall strive to obtain 3 estimates. Otherwise, Regulation 10 (3) above shall apply.

The Council shall not be obliged to accept the lowest or any tender, quote or estimate.

INSURANCE

Following an annual risk assessment, the RFO shall effect all insurances and negotiate all claims on the Council's insurers

The RFO shall give prompt notification to the Council of all new risks, properties or vehicles which require to be insured and of any alterations affecting existing insurances.

The RFO shall keep a record of all insurances effected by the Council and the property and risks covered thereby and annually review it.

The RFO shall be notified of any loss liability or damage or of any event likely to lead to a claim, and shall report these to Council at the next available meeting.

All appropriate employees of the Council shall be included in a suitable fidelity guarantee insurance which shall cover the maximum risk exposure as determined by the Council.

CHARITIES

Where the Council is sole trustee of a Charitable body the RFO and Treasurer shall ensure that separate accounts are kept of the funds held on charitable trusts and separate financial reports made in such form as shall be appropriate, in accordance with Charity Law and legislation, or as determined by the Charity Commission. The RFO shall arrange for any Audit or Independent Examination as may be required by Charity Law or any Governing Document.

RISK MANAGEMENT

The RFO shall prepare and promote risk management policy statements in respect of all activities of the Council.

When considering any new activity the RFO shall prepare a draft Risk Management policy for the activity and shall bring a draft addressing the legal and financial liabilities and Risk Management issues that arise to Council for consideration and, if thought appropriate, adoption.

REVISION OF FINANCIAL REGULATIONS

It shall be the duty of the Council to review the Financial Regulations of the Council from time to time, e.g. every three years.