

# **Alstonefield Parish Council**

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**Chairman** – Richard Butler (tel. 01335 310620)

**Vice Chairman** – Gordon Campbell (tel. 07919 353800)

**Councillors** – Alan Hayes (tel. 01335 310057)

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## **RISK ASSESSMENT POLICY OVERVIEW**

This document is an overview of the means by which Parish Council seeks to assess the risks that it faces, satisfy itself that it has taken adequate steps to minimise those risks and thereby enable it to make an adequate declaration in its annual return to the Audit Commission.

There are four appendices which cover all aspects of the Council's risk assessment policy in detail. Appendix i explains the process; a checklist covering Normal Business Risk Assessment (Appendix ii) is used by the Clerk to check that all reasonable risks have been considered; a Special Events Risk Assessment (see Appendix iii) is available for use for one-off events which are not covered under normal business activity; Appendix iv lists the council's assets in detail and sets out a normal maintenance schedule.

The three major areas of risk assessment – loss of financial control, lack of knowledge of regulations governing council actions and codes of conduct and inadequate health and safety procedures covering equipment, and the people who use it, and other assets under the control of the council – are summarised below.

### **1. FINANCIAL CONTROL**

The Council seeks to maintain financial control by a number of mechanisms, the most important of which is a set of rules of financial governance, set out in the Financial Regulations document adopted by the Council at its meeting of 21<sup>st</sup> May 2008 (last reviewed April 2019) A summary of the main points of this are set out below:

#### **a) Asset Register**

The Council maintains a list of assets – both land and non-fixed assets – which it reviews annually.

#### **b) Bank Accounts**

All Council monies are transacted through the Council's current bank account. All monies received are paid into the account by the Parish Clerk. All expenditures are made using cheques drawn against the account. Each cheque must be signed by two of the councillors who are authorised signatories to the account (the Clerk is not an authorised signatory) and the counterfoils initialled. In addition, the signatories also check and initial the accompanying paperwork (invoices) verifying the details of the expenditure.

#### **c) Annual Budget**

The Council produces a budget each year in November and the Precept is set on the basis of this budget.

#### **d) Financial Reporting**

At every Parish Council meeting the Clerk (RFO) presents a statement of payments made since the previous Parish Council and cheques presented for signature at the meeting. A year-to-date budget versus actual statement of income and expenditure against each of the agreed budget line items is also presented periodically, along with a bank reconciliation statement. All the financial reports presented to the Council, if they are not actually included in the minutes, are available for inspection by members of the public upon application.

#### **e) Auditing of Accounts**

The Council has an internal councillor auditor who assists the Clerk/RFO by carrying out a regular check of the accounts against the bank statement. The Council has appointed an Independent Examiner who carries out at least one audit session during the year. At the final of these sessions, the Independent Examiner will verify the accounts and all other paperwork contributing to the official audit return, will make his own declaration of assessment of the Council's governance (including verifying the Financial Regulations), which he may qualify by an audit review statement,

all of which is then presented for official audit by the Audit Commission inspector. The Independent Examiner's Audit Review is presented to the first Council session following the audit and forms the basis for any reviews and reforms during the following year.

#### **f) Employer's Fiscal Responsibility**

The Council ensures that all its employees have proper contracts of employment, complying with all current HM R&C legislation, and these are audited by the Independent Examiner as part of the annual audit.

#### **g) Best Value**

The Council has a set of procurement procedures (detailed in the Financial Regulations) which it follows when placing any order for goods or services. The principal criteria for such orders are best value for money and/or the desire to use local suppliers.

### **2. COUNCILLOR RESPONSIBILITIES**

The Council seeks to operate all its activities and procedures according to the various regulations governing local councils and to do so in a way which is totally transparent to the electors.

#### **a) Standing Orders and Codes of Conduct**

The main vehicles governing councillor actions (specific financial responsibility is governed by the Financial Regulations referred to above) and procedures are the Standing Orders document which was adopted by the Council at its meeting of 5<sup>th</sup> September 2018 (reviewed April 2019) and the Code of Conduct document which was adopted by the Council at its meeting of 19<sup>th</sup> June 2007 (reviewed August 2014). The Council also uses the second edition of the Good Councillor's Guide, the current edition of the Working With Your Council work book (a guide for Parish Council Clerks) and the current edition of Charles Arnold Baker. In addition the Council is a member of the Staffordshire Parish Councils' Association which it consults on any matter concerning Council powers and every new councillor is required to attend a new councillor course.

#### **b) Councillor Probity**

Every Councillor signs a declaration on taking up office attesting to their intention to abide by the Council's Code of Conduct and in addition, signs a declaration of financial and other interests, which details any attachment which may prejudice their ability to be impartial in any discussion. The Clerk holds a copy of these declarations and they are reviewed annually. In addition, the first agenda item (after apologies) of every Council meeting requires Councillors to declare any interest on any subsequent agenda item and all councillors are aware of their obligations under this stricture.

### **3. HEALTH AND SAFETY PROCEDURES**

The Council owns no buildings and therefore its health and safety obligations are restricted to its employees (or sub-contractors), any equipment or street furniture it may own and the condition of a playing field which it does own.

#### **a) Harm to Third Parties**

The Council assures itself that the Lengthmen, whether directly employed or sub-contracted, understand their responsibility to carry out their duties with regard both to their own safety and that of the public. The Council has insurance cover to enable it to meet any third party liability that it might face if an accident were to occur and the Council found to be in default of its duties.

#### **b) Equipment and other Assets Assessment**

All Lengthman equipment owned by the Council is subject to an annual maintenance inspection. Other assets, such as benches, are subject to an annual visual inspection, conducted by the Clerk and one other councillor, to verify that they remain viable and safe to use. [See Appendix iv – The Assets Maintenance Schedule.] Specialist equipment – contained within the children's play area – is visually inspected every week by a team of volunteers and a professional safety assessment is carried out annually by RoSPA and any report is considered by the Council for follow-up action. The condition of the playing field is maintained by a team of volunteers who, along with the lengthmen, report any visible damage noticed in the course of their duties.

#### **c) Adequacy of Insurance**

The level of insurance cover undertaken by the Council is scrutinised by the Independent Examiner as part of the annual audit to ensure that the Council is properly insured, including public liability and fidelity insurance.