



GENERAL RISK ASSESSMENT

Latest version as adopted on 15th April 2024
Revision by the Finance Committee due: April 2025

Introduction

Risk management is an essential part of effective corporate governance. The council has a statutory duty to have in place arrangements for managing risk as stated in the Accounts and Audit Regulations 2015:

“A relevant authority must ensure that it has a sound system of internal control which ensures that the financial and operational management of the authority is effective and includes effective arrangements for the management of risk”

Helsby Parish Council acknowledges that it has a responsibility to manage its risks effectively in order to protect its employees, assets, liabilities and community against potential losses. The council is aware that not all risks can be eliminated fully, however through correct and careful procedures there will be a focused approach to managing any risks.

Helsby Parish Council currently adheres to the guidance given by JPAG (Joint Panel on Accountability and Governance) in their publication *“Governance and Accountability for Smaller Authorities in England”* Section 5 for the layout of this risk assessment. Risk for each area is assessed as high, medium or low (as based on the likelihood of the risk and the potential impact).

This document will be reviewed at least annually by the Clerk and the Finance Committee.

Helsby Parish Council is also audited annually. The internal audit process checks that we have adequate provision and policies in place to support this risk assessment.

Risk Assessment carried out by: Claire Jones, Clerk and RFO

Signature:

Date: 25/09/23

No	AREA	RISK IDENTIFIED	RISK H/M/L	MEASURES/COMMENTS	FURTHER ACTION REQUIRED
ASSETS AND SERVICES					
1	Play area, parish field and Sherwood Court	Vandalism. Injury. Cost of replacement. Legal liability. Loss of amenity.	M	Weekly visual and written inspections by contractor/actions taken. Monthly written inspections by Northwich Town Council/actions taken. Annual inspections by ROSPA/actions taken. Public liability and equipment insurance. Regular maintenance - funds held in ear-marked reserves. CCTV system installed. Periodic servicing of gym equipment by Caloo.	
2	Trees on parish council-owned land	Falling branches and debris causing injury/damage. Legal liability.	M	Visual inspections, particularly after inclement weather. Public liability insurance. Tree surveys undertaken at least every 3 years by qualified tree surgeon and actions taken as recommended.	
3	Street furniture and other council-owned assets (e.g. bus shelter, war memorial, gates and fencing, noticeboards, office equipment, Maltby Triangle)	Damage. Vandalism/theft. Cost of replacement/repair. Deterioration. Legal liability.	L	Insurance including public liability. Inspection by councillors and contractors. Maintenance regime. Funds held in budget and ear-marked reserves.	
4	Loss or damage of IT infrastructure/hard copy files and loss of use of office due to disaster or other reasons	Interruption to effective administration. Possible financial loss. Unable to provide services. Destruction	M	Office 365 used and files saved to cloud-based storage. Virus protection. Replace equipment periodically. Office equipment insured for replacement value. Deeds and cemetery records placed in locked, fire-proof cabinet. Scan important files to store electronically. Purchase a laptop and work from home or other office space nearby.	Investigate enhanced cyber security, virus protection

		of files and office equipment.		Get phone number diverted for internet access. Connect to Wifi for email retrieval (4G back-up connection). Annual PAT testing of electrical equipment. Computers password protected.	and file back-up measures.
5	Loss of land owned by council	Land unable to be used. Legal expenses.	L	Title deeds held in safe in parish office. All land registered with HM Land Registry. Robust lease and tenant agreements in place, where applicable.	Complete recent lease queries.
6	Poor management of cemetery	Undue distress to bereft family members. Loss of amenity. Reputational damage. Health and safety of users.	M	Robust Cemetery Regulations and internal controls including: records of interment, cemetery plan cross referenced with burial book and up to date records kept of interments and receipts. Staff and councillors attend relevant training courses. Funds held in ear-marked reserves for additional land when required. Health and safety inspections carried out annually and headstones tested at least every 5 years. Public liability insurance. Specific cemetery risk assessment, reviewed annually by PCA Committee.	Arrange memorial inspection ASAP.
7	Poor management of Helsby Community Centre	Health and safety of users. Loss of amenity. Reputational damage.	M	Council to have representative trustee on management committee. Periodic updates given to council. Funds held in ear-marked reserves for maintenance when required.	Further checks of H&S procedures may be beneficial.
8	Poor management of allotments	Loss of amenity. Reputational damage. Health and safety of users.	L	Up to date tenant records and waiting list kept. Monthly plot inspections carried out. Health and safety inspections carried out annually. Allotment Policy and signed Tenancy Agreements. Insurance taken out on behalf of tenants.	
9	Misuse of parish field by third party when running an event	Legal liability. Distress caused to adjacent property owners.	L	Users must have adequate insurance cover and submit risk assessment. Other conditions will apply depending on the purpose the field will be used for.	

10	Accidental loss or damage to fixed assets	Costs of repair or replacement. Loss of service until repaired/replaced.	L	Maintain insurance. An up-to-date register of fixed assets. Fixed Asset Policy.	
11	Christmas tree and lights.	Injury. Theft. Cost of replacement. Legal liability. Loss of amenity.	L	Specialist contractors have own insurance and risk assessments and are responsible for checking, servicing, installing and removing assets. Insurance including public liability. Annual budget for maintenance/replacements. Tree and lights inspected after inclement weather. Stored securely.	
12	General village maintenance	Health and safety of workers. Loss of contract.	M	Specialist contractor has own insurance and risk assessments. Contractor carries out relevant training. Contract operated on a 3-year cycle – at least 3 tenderers are sought.	Contractor to carry out further training on playground inspections

No	AREA	RISK IDENTIFIED	RISK H/M/L	MEASURES/COMMENTS	FURTHER ACTION REQUIRED
ADMINISTRATIVE AND LEGAL LIABILITIES					
13	Failure to attract sufficient candidates for member vacancies or elections	Reduced representation. Unable to provide services. Possible meetings inquorate.	M	Actively publicise council activities. Seek candidates amongst friends and colleagues. Publicise elections and vacancies on notice boards. Publicise elections and vacancies in Helsby News, Facebook and on HPC website. Encourage volunteers and non-voting councillors to join working groups.	Currently 6 vacancies.
14	Failure to achieve quorum at meetings	Business not transacted. Decisions not made.	M	Issue annual meeting calendar to all members. Issue meeting agendas promptly. Record attendance. Clerk to seek substitute members for Committee meetings.	Low committee membership.
15	Lack of public consultation by council and failure to identify local needs and wishes	Decisions not based on evidence. People disenfranchised. Council does not represent public views.	L	Ensure meetings are publicised. Use Annual Parish Meetings. Place articles in Helsby News/Facebook. Include public participation session at all meetings. Ensure seating is available at meetings for public. Provide advice for members of the public attending meetings. Publish agendas and minutes on website. Carry out public consultation exercise at least every 5 years. Use events to seek feedback. Councillor surgeries.	
16	Members acting alone outside meetings	Members outside compliance. Indemnities invalid. Personal risk. Legal liability.	M	Members read the 'Good Councillor Guide' and other relevant guidance. Members should not make commitments on behalf of the council. Attend relevant training courses by ChALC and others. Training Policy.	
17	Council decisions not implemented	Confidence undermined. Reputational risk. Possible losses.	M	Clerk to publish minutes within 2 weeks of meetings (marked as draft). Minutes to be considered at next meeting. Outstanding actions log presented at each meeting.	

18	Inaccurate, untimely, improper minutes	Poor decisions made. Poor evidence for decisions.	L	Clerk to check minutes with members not more than 7 days after meeting. Unapproved minutes published on website (marked as draft).	
19	Inadequate document control	Poor evidence. Poor support to members.	L	Clerk to establish filing and retrieval system. Clerk to enforce document version control.	Further filing is required.
20	Failure to recognise and address conflict of interest	Lack of transparency. Open to complaints of fairness or bias.	M	All members to be given Code of Conduct and offered induction training and buddy. Programme for New Councillors. Procedures outlined in Standing Orders.	
21	Incomplete/inaccurate register of members' interests	Lack of transparency. Open to complaints of fairness or bias.	L	All members to be given Code of Conduct and offered induction training and buddy. Programme for New Councillors. Register of Members' Interests forms sent to CW&C and on HPC website.	
22	Loss of services of clerk	Interruption to effective administration. Unable to provide services.	M	Members trained to undertake wide range of financial and administrative tasks. Instruction booklet available for councillors. Chair given appropriate passwords in sealed envelope. Contact SLCC for locum clerk if necessary. Give chair copies of keys to the parish office cupboards.	
23	Lack of defined objectives or strategy	Resources not directed. Poor performance. Risks not base lined.	L	Council to produce an agreed 5-year business plan.	
24	Allegations of libel or slander	Potential for litigation. Costs of investigation. Reduces confidence. Legal liability.	M	Clerk to intervene at meetings, review all press releases and newsletter articles before release. Adequate insurance cover. Complaints Policy. Freedom of Information Policy.	
25	Bad publicity	Reduces confidence.	L	Review all press releases or newsletter articles before release. Manage press relations.	

				Social Media Policy.	
26	Insurance	Inadequate insurance or over insurance. Areas not covered. Policy lapsed.	M	Council covered with Zurich. Cover is reviewed annually by Finance Committee or if circumstances change. Policy taken out competitively on a 3-year long term undertaking basis.	Insurance values to be included within asset register.
27	Inadequate awareness of relevant legislation and lack of knowledge	Failure to comply. Poor decisions made.	L	Maintain membership of ChALC/NALC/ICCM. Clerk to train/qualify. Training Policy. Purchase of relevant literature (e.g. Arnold Baker).	
28	Failure to comply with relevant legislation	Legal liability. Reputation damage.	L	Maintain membership of ChALC/NALC. Clerk to train/qualify. Training Policy. Liaise with internal and external auditors. Purchase of relevant literature (e.g. Arnold Baker).	
29	HMRC and employment law requirements not met	Costs. Legal liability. Liability for unpaid tax. Fines.	L	Independent payroll provider submits returns to HMRC and processes salaries and pensions. Monthly returns made to the Inland Revenue. Employees have a written statement of employment – annually reviewed. Employer liability insurance. Subject to internal audit.	
30	Risk associated with the General Data Protection Regulations	Legal liability. Personal data, held by the council, getting into the wrong hands. Fine by the Information Commissioner. Loss of trust in the council.	M	General Privacy Notice, Publication Scheme and data map in place. Document Retention Policy. Clerk and members adequately trained. CCTV and Surveillance Policy. Minimal confidential data is held. Security measures in place eg. safe, shredding, firewall, passwords are secure. Files kept in locked cupboards and computers password protected. Registered with the Information Commissioner's Office (ICO). Data is only held and distributed in accordance with GDPR rules.	New GDPR policies to be drawn up
31	Health and safety of staff	Employee's welfare at stake.	L	Robust health and safety policy and risk assessments in place (reviewed annually).	

		Legal liability.		Personal protective and lone worker equipment is provided to council employees and replaced when necessary. Lone Working Policy in place (annually reviewed).	
32	Health and safety of councillors, visitors and contractors	Legal liability.	L	Health and Safety Policy in place and £12m public liability cover.	

No	AREA	RISK IDENTIFIED	RISK H/M/L	MEASURES/COMMENTS	FURTHER ACTION REQUIRED
FINANCE AND CONTRACTS					
33	Financial (general)	Misappropriation of council funds. Financial loss.	M	All banking arrangements and changes to banking services approved by the council and recorded in the minutes. Pay invoices by cheque/internet banking. Internet Banking - two councillors to authorise online payments. Monthly reconciliation of accounts to be signed by the Chair at each Full Council meeting. Annual scrutiny of all financial records by Finance Committee and internal auditor. Accounts sent annually to external auditor for review. All changes in banking instructions, mandates etc. to be in writing with a hard copy kept permanently on file. Anti-fraud and Corruption Policy.	
34	Failure to respond to electors wishing to exercise right of inspection of accounts	Complaints received. Not transparent. Non-compliance.	L	Clerk to advertise facility and respond to requests.	
35	Payments	Goods not supplied but invoiced. Invoices incorrect. Invoices unpaid.	L	All invoices checked for accuracy and receipt of goods/services in line with comprehensive Financial Regulations. List of payments presented at every Full Council meeting. Clear audit trail of all expenditure and checked via internal audit. All expenditure authorised by Full Council as per Financial Regulations.	Internal Control Policy to be introduced with robust internal controls
36	Failure of bank	Financial loss.	M	Funds placed in 5 separate accounts. Policies in place in Financial Regulations.	
37	Cheque books	Loss of cheques. Fraudulent use.	L	All cheque books kept in locked drawer in office. All cheques and cheque stubs signed by two councillors and the clerk and only when matched to invoice/purchase order. No blank cheques signed. Used only in line with Financial Regulations and checked at audit.	

38	Poor return on investments	Financial loss.	L	Interest rates reviewed at least annually by Finance Committee. Investment Policy in place.	Introduce Investment Policy
39	Failure to complete/submit annual return on time	Poor auditors report. Public confidence suffers.	L	Clerk to maintain diary.	
40	Risk associated with partnerships and contracts	Poor levels of service or total loss of service. Possible increased costs. Reputational damage. Council not achieving "Value for Money". Risk of misunderstandings.	L	NALC's national Standing Orders model adopted. Separate financial regs. Clerk adequately trained. Conduct thorough research on companies and produce reports for meetings. Pay on completion of works/service. Written contracts over £5,000 and detailed tender analysis. Issue thorough tender specifications. Credit Management Policy.	
41	Orders for work, goods and services. Monitoring of performances against agreed standards under partnership agreements.	Unable to fulfil responsibilities.	M	Procedures set out in Standing Orders and Financial Regulations. Reviewed at internal audit.	
42	Failure to calculate/submit precept on time	Inadequate resources to meet commitments. Costs of re-billing.	M	Clerk to respond to Cheshire West and Chester Council notices. Agenda item for members to consider and approve.	
43	Inadequate annual precept and unsound	Inadequate resources to meet commitments.	M	Clerk and members to build sound budget, using risk register and known commitments, and monitors this throughout the year. Reserves Policy.	

	budget. Late payment from CW&C.	Could run out of funds completely.		Contingencies in place through general reserves. Scrutiny of all financial records by Finance Committee and auditors.	
44	Failure to account for and recover VAT	Wasted resources.	L	Clerk to process reclaim annually. Internal auditor to check.	
45	Failure to stay within agreed budgets	Inadequate control.	L	Clerk to monitor. Committees to review budgets at every meeting.	
46	Holding excessive or inadequate reserves	Auditors report. Poor use of resources. Inability to meet commitments.	L	Clerk to review as part of budgeting. Reserves Policy to set percentage of precept. Council to review size of reserves. Council to produce an agreed 5-year business plan.	
47	Fraud by Clerk	Reputation costs. Legal liability. Unable to provide services.	M	Adequate internal audit. Control systems for managing expenditure. Internal controls including prevention and detection of fraud and corruption. Fidelity Guarantee Insurance. Three signatures required on cheques and direct debit authorities. Monthly reconciliations of the bank statements to the financial records presented to Full Council. Independent payroll provider processes salaries (D M Payroll Services).	
48	Fraud by Members	Reputation costs. Legal liability. Unable to provide services.	M	Adequate internal audit. Control systems for managing expenditure. Internal controls including prevention and detection of fraud and corruption. Fidelity Guarantee Insurance. Three signatures required on cheques and direct debit authorities. Monthly reconciliations of the bank statements to the financial records presented to Full Council.	
49	Failure to maintain fixed assets register	Improper control. Poor auditor's report.	L	Council to review. Internal audit to review.	
50	Improper financial records	Potential for wasted resources.	M	Council subscribes to online accounting package, Scribe. Internal audit to review.	

51	Failure to comply with deadlines for accounts and returns	Poor auditor's report. Reduction in confidence.	L	Clerk aware of annual deadlines. If in doubt, liaise with internal and external auditors.	
52	Risks associated with internet banking	Misappropriation of funds. Unable to provide services. Reputational damage.	H	Invoices to be paid by bank transfer at least once per month. Bank processing should be approved by at least two official signatories. Processing to be carried out in the parish office. Copies of bank transactions and invoices to be recorded in Scribe. At least two signatories to authorise payments via electronic approval system (e.g. SignRequest). All transactions and income to be approved and recorded in minutes. Signatories to check bank reconciliations against bank accounts.	Implement multiple signatory internet banking and move to account that does not link to members' personal accounts
53	Risks of supplier (procurement) fraud including the adequacy of supplier onboarding controls	Loss of council funds.	M	Before entering into contracts with companies or other bodies the Council will carry out due diligence to safeguard public funds. All, or as many as deemed necessary, of the following measures will be taken: - A check at Companies House; - The lowest deposit possible to be negotiated, if appropriate; - A suitable retention to be negotiated, if appropriate; - The Council to require terms and conditions, depending on the contract value, as deemed appropriate; - If appropriate the Council to buy goods and materials directly from the suppliers; - Materials to be delivered to where the Council specifies and at an agreed time to suit the Clerk; and - New payee checks to be carried out through the Council's online banking facility.	
54	Expenditure being incurred which is not within the legal	Ultra vires expenditure – illegal transactions.	L	Recording in the minutes the powers under which expenditure is approved <u>or</u> council having general power of competence.	

	powers available to local councils.	Local elector challenge. Audit investigation/ public interest report			
55	Risk of a complaint from an elector if a contract is not fairly awarded.	Investigation by external auditor leading to increased audit fees, public interest report etc. Reputational damage. Poor value for money.	L	Standing Orders and Financial Regulations in place dealing with the award of contracts. Complaint procedure in place. Contracts Finder for projects over £25k.	