



HELSEBY PARISH COUNCIL

Minutes of the Policy and Procedures Committee meeting held at 7pm in the parish office at Helsby Community Sports Club on Monday 17th March 2025

Present:

Cllr. Sarah Temple – Chair
Cllr. Chris Ellams
Cllr. Rob Nicklin
Cllr. Graham Stothard

Also present:

Claire Jones Parish Clerk

1. Public Participation – no matters were brought to the committee’s attention.
2. Apologies were noted from Cllr. O’Neill. Cllr. Branigan did not attend.
3. Declarations of Members’ Interests. None were reported.
4. Confirmation of previous minutes. It was **RESOLVED** that the minutes of the Policy and Procedures Committee meeting held on 25th November 2024 be accepted as accurate and were duly signed by the Chair – **PP01/25**.
5. Clerk’s report – the following was noted:
 - Item 5 – Cheshire Record Office was expected to re-open during the first half of 2026 and a link to Helsby News had been sent to the British Library;
 - Item 5 – the Clerk had been unable to gather any further information from SLCC or NALC about gender identity guidance, although it was increasingly common to use more gender-neutral terminology (e.g. chair, rather than chairman);
 - Item 5 – issues in relation to rights of access across land at Mountain View would be taken forward through the PCA Committee;
 - Item 5 – the Clerk confirmed the arrangements for emptying the cemetery bin;
 - Item 7 – the GDPR working group had not had an opportunity to meet, but a few aspects would be covered in later items on the agenda; and
 - All policies that were reviewed at the last meeting were now available to view on the website.
6. The latest policy table was noted. It was agreed that grouping the policies into various sections was a helpful additional feature. It was suggested that a ‘public’ version of the table should be included within the policy section of the website containing links to each

policy. It was agreed that this should also include the minimum review period for each document as well as a short description of the policy.

Various methods to date and number documents were discussed. It was agreed that details of adoption/review under the title should be removed or modified and that all policies should include an appendix containing the following information:

- the date of the latest approval or adoption date;
- whether the policy was approved/adopted by Full Council or by a particular committee;
- a policy version reference number; and
- the date for the next review.

It was agreed that all policies should be referenced as Version 1 from March 2025, with any subsequent minor amendments, such as typo's or admin changes, then being referenced as 1.1 or any major amendments being numbered as Version 2 (with relevant minute references). It was suggested that the appendix could also include a few notes about why the policy had been updated to a new version and a change history of the details of any related previous policies which had been superseded.

Minimum review periods for all policy documents were agreed, ranging from annually to every four years. The Clerk agreed to amend the policy table and all the existing policies to reflect this.

As set out above, it was **RESOLVED to update the policy table including any revised review periods; to create a new referencing system in the appendices of each policy; and to add a new 'public' version of the policy table to the website – PP02/25.**

7. Review of Standing Orders

The following amendments were proposed:

- P.22 - Add 'Biodiversity Policy' to Environment Committee section;
- P.24 - Put grass and hedge cutting together as a single contract in the PCA Committee section and take out the reference to the CCTV and Surveillance Policy (move this policy to the P&P Committee);
- P.26 - Finance Committee – delete reference to any specific policies and refer to the list of 'Finance Committee Policies' included within the policy table;
- P.27 - delete reference to any specific policies and refer to the list of 'Policy and Procedure Committee Policies' included within the policy table; revise existing wording to say 'To consider and recommend the adoption of any new policies and procedures'; add 'to maintain a list of all council policies and responsibilities with minimum review periods'; add 'to advise if a policy requires early review, for example, as a result of any updated legislation, and to monitor the introduction of any new model documents and changes to any existing model documents';
- P.29 - Add 'PCSO' under information about councillor surgeries and add 'the location to be determined on an ad-hoc basis';

- P. 29 – Under ‘Policy Reviews’ – add some further information to reflect the new methodology set out in Item 6 above.

It was **RESOLVED to recommend to Full Council to formally adopt the above amendments to the Standing Orders – PP03/25.**

8. Policy Updates

Code of Conduct

A revised draft version of the document was considered as based on the latest version of CW&C’s Constitution dated November 2024. The main changes were noted as: addition of some new text in the introduction; various sections deleted as not applicable to parish councils; reworded ‘member’ to ‘councillor’ and ‘local authority’ to ‘council’; and added a new section on ‘Sensitive Interests’. Only one additional amendment to the draft was suggested - to update the review period in Section 1.7 (to reword to ‘undertake a periodic review’). It was **RESOLVED to recommend to Full Council to formally adopt the revised Code of Conduct as based on CW&C’s latest Constitution subject to the amendment above – PP04/25.**

Disciplinary Policy

It was outlined that this had been rewritten as based on NALC’s latest model version dated August 2024, with only minor amendments made in relation to any references to ‘manager’ and ‘staffing committee’. The Clerk agreed to check that the Retention and Disposal Policy covered the handling of any audio or video recordings from disciplinary proceedings. Only one amendment to the draft was suggested - to reword ‘Data Protection Policy’ to ‘GDPR policies’ on page 3 under Examples of Gross Misconduct. It was **RESOLVED to recommend to Full Council to adopt the updated Disciplinary Policy as based on NALC’s latest model document – PP05/25.**

Grievance Policy

It was outlined that this had been rewritten based on NALC’s latest model version dated August 2024. The Clerk agreed to insert numbering in the same manner as the Disciplinary Policy. It was **RESOLVED to recommend to Full Council to adopt the updated Grievance Policy as based on NALC’s latest model document subject to the insertion of section numbering – PP06/25.**

Equality and Diversity Policy

It was outlined that this had been rewritten based on NALC’s latest model version dated September 2024. The Clerk agreed to add ‘this *non-contractual* policy’ to the first line under Section 10 and to remove the last sentence in this section. Administrative details about policy at the end of the document would be removed (and replaced by an appendix as set out in item 6 above). It was **RESOLVED to recommend to Full Council to adopt the updated Equality and Diversity Policy as based on NALC’s latest model document – PP07/25.**

Lone Working Policy and Risk Assessment

It was outlined that this policy had been rewritten based on NALC's latest model version dated August 2024 but amended in places to reflect the council's own situation. It was noted that any references to the dissolved H&S Committee had been removed. The following amendments were agreed:

- to reword a sentence on page 2, Section 5, 'People who work alone face the same risks in their work as those doing similar roles/tasks *in an environment with more than one person*'.
- In the risk assessment, under 'Risk of violence from members of the public entering the parish office' to add an action for the Clerk to explore the option of installing a video doorbell system with audio communication; and
- Also in the risk assessment (page 5), to add 'or other suitable person (e.g. parish councillor)' to the following sentence: 'If staff have concerns about security or suspect there is an intruder in the building, they must contact the premises manager' and amend the following sentence to: '...and await the arrival of support'.

It was **RESOLVED to recommend to Full Council to adopt the updated Lone Working Policy and Risk Assessment as based on NALC's latest model document subject to the amendments above and for the Clerk to explore a video doorbell system with audio communication for the parish office – PP08/25.**

General Risk Assessment

The following amendments were proposed:

- Risk 1: replace 'Northwich Town Council' with 'contractor' and add 'Clerk qualified as an Operational Play Inspector (February 2025)';
- Risk 2: add 'Book in tree survey during 2025';
- Risk 4: add 'Office 365 Business Premium used (offering enhanced cyber security and virus protection)', 'Sharepoint/One Drive used for file sharing' and 'investigate additional cyber security packages';
- Risk 8: reword from 'monthly' allotment inspections to 'periodic' inspections;
- Risk 12: add 'Contractor qualified as an Operational Play Inspector (February 2025)' and add some information in relation to the Highways Volunteer Scheme, including the need to carry a first aid kit. The Clerk also agreed to investigate attending a first aid training course and purchasing a new first aid kit;
- Risk 13: amend to 'Currently 8 vacancies' and add 'Actively seek new councillors';
- Risk 15: add website to 'Place articles in Helsby News/Facebook';
- Risk 26: add 'Insurance values included within asset register';
- Risks 27 and 28: Reword 'Clerk to qualify' to 'Clerk is appropriately qualified';
- Risk 31: Reword 'Lone Working Policy in place (annually reviewed)' to ...'reviewed periodically';
- Risk 35: add 'Internal Control Policy with robust internal controls';
- Risk 36: reword to 'Funds placed across several separate accounts';
- Risk 46: add 'Investment Policy in place';

- Risk 47: amend to ‘Two signatures required on cheques and direct debit authorities’ and add ‘Clerk to copy Chair into any e-mails sent to the payroll supplier’;
- Risk 48: amend to ‘Two signatures required on cheques and direct debit authorities’;
- Risk 52: add ‘Unity online banking requires two signatories and account does not link to members’ personal accounts’; and
- Risk 55: reword ‘Contracts Finder for projects over £25k’ to ‘...over £30k’.

It was **RESOLVED to recommend to Full Council to update the General Risk Assessment with the amendments above and for the Clerk to explore the details of any first aid training courses and the purchase of a new first aid kit - PP09/25.**

Publication Scheme

It was noted that the document had been updated to include all the latest policies as well as the new website address. It was agreed to make the additional amendments: under Part 2, to add ‘electronic copies’ to bank statements and to add ‘website’ under Cemetery Risk Assessment. The Clerk agreed to check the legislation references relating to data protection.

It was **RESOLVED to recommend to Full Council to update the Publication Scheme with the amendments above – PP10/25.**

Freedom of Information Policy

It was agreed to update the council’s website address in the policy, amend any references to the ‘Chairman’ and to reword the ‘Data Protection Act’ to ‘GDPR legislation’.

Subject to the above, it was **RESOLVED to recommend to Full Council to update the Freedom of Information Policy – PP11/25.**

Sickness Absence Policy

A revised policy was presented for discussion as based on NALC’s model version, dated August 2024. The Clerk agreed to check that any wording in Section 9.2 (i.e. where ill health might need to bring employment to an end) was in line with the latest disciplinary policy. It was agreed to remove the notes section but to add a sentence at the end of the policy to say: ‘The Council may also wish to refer to the notes in NALC’s latest model document’.

It was **RESOLVED to recommend to Full Council to update the latest Sickness Absence Policy subject to the amendments above – PP12/25.**

Health and Safety Policy

It was **RESOLVED to recommend to Full Council to update the Health and Safety Policy with only one amendment – to delete ‘but at least annually’ from the final sentence – PP13/25.**

On a general note, it was agreed that for consistency, any references to Helsby Parish Council would be amended to 'the council' across all policies, where appropriate. The Clerk agreed to remove any folders mistakenly named as 'Winsford Town Council' on the website (namely the Health and Safety and Equality and Diversity policies).

9. Co-Option of Councillors Policy

It was outlined that this new policy had been drafted as based on Nantwich Town Council's co-option policy and an SLCC advice note 'Councillor Vacancy and Co-Option Procedure'. It was suggested under Section 4 that the word 'casual' was inserted before 'vacancy' in the first sentence. It was also agreed to add the following to Section 7: the chair shall allow questions from councillors for each candidate; and councillors may decide to defer consideration of the application to a later meeting (for example, to allow a candidate to attend meetings to observe them and to improve their knowledge of council business before continuing their application).

It was **RESOLVED to recommend to Full Council to formally adopt the Co-Option of Councillors Policy subject to the amendments above – PP14/25.**

It was **RESOLVED to continue the meeting beyond a period of two hours in order to complete the remaining items on the agenda – PP15/25.**

10. Remaining Policies Due for Renewal

It was outlined that the following documents remained due for renewal and could be included in the agenda for the next meeting:

- The Programme for New Councillors and the Councillor Induction Pack;
- The Officer and Member Protocol;
- CCTV and Surveillance Policy;
- Social Media and Press and Media Policies; and
- GDPR – additional policies.

11. Members noted SLCC's 'Suggested List of Policies and Documentation for a Small Council' (dated 2019) and a list of suggested policies from a recent SLCC workshop/template (dated 2024). It was agreed that these could help to identify which other policies that council might need to adopt in future (e.g. IT and cybersecurity, training and development, employee and councillor expenses, staff handbook, volunteer, safeguarding).

12. Urgent matters – it was noted that Cllr. Nicklin had circulated a draft social media policy and would welcome comments to refine it before formal review at the next meeting. It was agreed to add this to the agenda for the next meeting. The Clerk agreed to send any relevant model templates from NALC/SLCC to Cllr. Nicklin.

13. Date of next meeting – to be agreed, but would be held in June.

The meeting closed at 9.06pm.

Chair's signature Dated.....

DRAFT