



Helsby Parish Council

Minutes of the Policy and Procedures Committee meeting held at 7pm in the parish office at Helsby Community Sports Club on Monday 4th December 2023

Present:

Cllr. Sarah Temple – Chair

Cllr. Mike Branigan

Cllr. Rob Nicklin

Also present:

Claire Jones Parish Clerk

1. Public Participation – no matters were brought to the committee’s attention.
2. Apologies were noted from Cllrs. Ellams and Stothard.
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 4th September 2023 were accepted as accurate and were signed by the Chair – PP06/23.**
5. Clerk’s report from previous minutes - Under Item 5, it was noted that most councillors had now submitted dispensation request forms for setting the precept. The clerk agreed to take further guidance on wider dispensation setting in due course. It was noted under Item 6 that the latest versions of the standing orders and the new appraisal policy had been placed on the website and that the Financial Regulations had been revised with the amendments agreed at the last meeting. The clerk outlined that Cheshire Record Office held council minutes from 1949-2013 and would be happy to archive further documents in due course. As set out in the Retention and Disposal of Documents Policy, the clerk agreed to send the British Library a weblink to the Helsby News.
6. Review of Existing Documents

Standing Orders (PCA Committee section)

Cllr. Temple presented a draft revised section for comment. Several amendments were suggested as follows:

- Play Area (first bullet point) – reword ROSPA to ‘recognised annual play inspection company’;

- Cemetery (fifth bullet point) – reword to ‘Ensure bin emptied’ (Clerk to check who currently empties this bin);
- Section 3 (first and second bullet points) – reword to ‘Lease relating to Scout Hut on Parish Field’ and ‘Lease relating to Guide Hut on Parish Field’;
- Section 4 (fifth bullet point) – add annual play area inspections;
- Section 5 (second bullet point) – amend from specified to earmarked reserves; and
- Delete Section 7 as this is already set out in Section 4(e)viii. of the Standing Orders.

It was **RESOLVED to recommend to Full Council to formally adopt the revised PCA Committee Section of the Standing Orders subject to the amendments above – PP07/23.** It was agreed not to formally add the section to the Standing Orders until the other equivalent committee sections had also been completed.

Under Section 1 (Land at Mountain View), the clerk agreed to look into sending letters to residents whose properties adjoined the land reminding them that the area was owned by the council (to prevent them from establishing a right of vehicular access for parking).

Publication Scheme, Privacy Notices and other GDPR policies

It was agreed that the Publication Scheme would be revised at a later meeting once the majority of policies had been updated/introduced. In the meantime, it was **RESOLVED to recommend to Full Council to remove any references to the council’s defunct committees within the document, to remove the signature section and to amend the header section to include relevant dates – PP08/23.** A revised General Privacy Policy was considered based on the council’s existing Privacy Notice document and the latest guidance from the ICO. It was agreed that this, along with any other relevant GDPR policies, would be considered by the committee once the clerk had taken further guidance at series of training courses on data protection to be held early in 2024.

Press and Media Policy and Electronic Communications/Social Media Policy

Following agreement to remove sections 7 and 8 from this draft new document (Sections on Facebook and document changes), it was **RESOLVED to recommend to Full Council to adopt the Press and Media Policy – PP09/23.** Members agreed to continue to work on the development of a new electronic communications and social media policy to include guidance relating to e-mails, the parish council website, video-conferencing and recording meetings. It was noted that the clerk had circulated several relevant SLCC template policies for consideration.

Code of Conduct

It was **RESOLVED to recommend to Full Council to amend the existing Code of Conduct as follows: to update the date on page 1 and to delete several references to the Monitoring Officer in Sections 9 and 10 in relation to the disclosure of interests – PP10/23.**

Complaints Procedure and Vexatious Complaints Policies

It was **RESOLVED to recommend to Full Council to adopt a revised version of the Complaints Procedure and to adopt a new policy on vexatious complaints as drafted – PP11/23.**

Disciplinary and Grievance Procedure

The clerk presented an updated Disciplinary and Grievance Procedure as based on the latest SLCC template document. It was agreed that the document only covered disciplinary procedures. On this basis, it was **RESOLVED to recommend to Full Council to adopt the document as a Disciplinary Procedure only with the following amendment: Section 2 (11th bullet point) reword to ‘Serious breach of the council’s policies relating to health and safety and confidentiality’ – PP12/23.** It was agreed that a revised Grievance Procedure would be drafted for consideration at the next meeting as based on the council’s current document and the NALC template.

Equality and Diversity Policy

The clerk presented an updated Equality and Diversity Policy as based on the latest SLCC template document. It was **RESOLVED to recommend to Full Council to adopt the new draft document with the following amendments: Section 4.2 delete all bullet points and reword to ‘Any equalities work undertaken by the parish council will be actively supported and assisted by the parish clerk’; and Section 5 (third bullet point) add ‘wherever possible’ in relation to providing facilities for disabled people – PP13/23.** The clerk agreed to seek further advice on any appropriate wording for more diverse gender identities.

Health and Safety Policy

It was **RESOLVED to retain the existing policy as based on the SLCC template with only a change to the dates on the document – PP14/23.** The clerk agreed to amend the website header for this policy which wrongly read ‘Winsford Town Council’.

7. Adoption of New Documents

Employee and Councillor Expenses Policy

A draft document was presented for discussion based on NALC’s model document. However, it was agreed to defer adopting the document until the new Unity bank account had been opened and the clerk was able to use the new credit card for purchases. Members agreed that the policy could incorporate some wording on the processing of missing receipts. It was also suggested that the policy could incorporate some guidance on councillors’ expenses.

Sickness Absence Policy

A draft new document based on NALC's template was considered. Several amendments were suggested as follows:

- Delete the duplicated sentence in Section 1;
- Under Section 3.1, reword 'manager' to 'Chair/Vice Chair' and reword 'The meeting would normally include....' to 'The meeting may include....';
- Under 4.1, delete 'without pay';
- Refer to the Green Book terms under Section 6;
- Delete references to the Local Government Pension Scheme in Section 9.2;
- In the notes section, amend the start of the first paragraph to 'We have adopted...'; correct the section numbering and delete the 'guidance' and 'important notice' sections.

It was **RESOLVED to recommend to Full Council to formally adopt the new Sickness Absence Policy subject to the amendments above – PP15/23.**

8. Table of Amendments – members considered whether to include a table of amendments in all policies. Members were in favour of this approach in principle, but it was agreed to defer any decisions to a later date. In the meantime, it was agreed that the minutes of the meetings and the clerk's electronic filing system would enable any policy changes to be identified. The clerk agreed to investigate what other town and parish councils did in this respect and whether there was any relevant guidance from SLCC/NALC.
9. Urgent matters – it was agreed that the policy table would be updated to include a new 'review period' column. The clerk agreed to explore recommended review periods for each policy in this respect.
10. Date of next meeting – Monday 18th March 2024 (to be agreed).

The meeting closed at 9.00pm.

Chair's signature Dated.....