

## SUNNINGHILL & ASCOT PARISH COUNCIL

### Financial Regulations

(reviewed May 2023)

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These Financial Regulations were adopted by the Council at its meeting held on [Date].

## 1. General

- 1.1 These financial regulations govern the conduct of financial management by the Council and may only be amended or varied by resolution of the council. Financial regulations are one of the council's three governing policy documents providing procedural guidance for members and officers. Financial regulations must be observed in conjunction with the council's standing orders and any individual financial regulations relating to contracts.
- 1.2 The Council is responsible in law for ensuring that its financial management is adequate and effective and that the Council has a sound system of internal control which facilitates the effective exercise of the council's functions, including arrangements for the management of risk.
- 1.3 The council's accounting control systems must include measures:
  - for the timely production of accounts;
  - that provide for the safe and efficient safeguarding of public money;
  - to prevent and detect inaccuracy and fraud; and
  - setting out the duties of officers.
- 1.4 These financial regulations demonstrate how the Council meets these responsibilities and requirements.
- 1.5 At least once a year, prior to approving the Annual Governance Statement, the Council must review the effectiveness of its system of internal control which shall be in accordance with proper practices.
- 1.6 Deliberate or wilful breach of these Regulations by an employee may give rise to disciplinary proceedings.
- 1.7 Members of Council are expected to follow the instructions within these Regulations and not to entice employees to breach them. Failure to follow instructions within these Regulations brings the office of councillor into disrepute.
- 1.8 The Responsible Financial Officer (RFO) holds a statutory office to be appointed by the council. The Clerk has been appointed as RFO for this Council and these regulations will apply accordingly.
- 1.9 The RFO:
  - acts under the policy direction of the Council;
  - administers the Council's financial affairs in accordance with all Acts, Regulations and proper practices;
  - determines on behalf of the Council its accounting records and accounting control systems;
  - ensures the accounting control systems are observed;

- maintains the accounting records of the Council up to date in accordance with proper practices;
  - assists the Council to secure economy, efficiency and effectiveness in the use of its resources; and
  - produces financial management information as required by the Council.
- 1.10 The accounting records determined by the RFO shall be sufficient to show and explain the Council's transactions and to enable the RFO to ensure that any income and expenditure account and statement of balances, or record of receipts and payments and additional information, as the case may be, or management information prepared for the Council from time to time comply with the Accounts and Audit Regulations.
- 1.11 The accounting records determined by the RFO shall in particular contain:
- entries from day to day of all sums of money received and expended by the Council and the matters to which the income and expenditure or receipts and payments account relate;
  - a record of the assets and liabilities of the council; and
  - wherever relevant, a record of the Council's income and expenditure in relation to claims made, or to be made, for any contribution, grant or subsidy.
- 1.12 The accounting control systems determined by the RFO shall include:
- procedures to ensure that the financial transactions of the Council are recorded as soon as reasonably practicable and as accurately and reasonably as possible;
  - procedures to enable the prevention and detection of inaccuracies and fraud and the ability to reconstruct any lost records;
  - identification of the duties of officers dealing with financial transactions and division of responsibilities of those officers in relation to significant transactions;
  - procedures to ensure that uncollectable amounts, including any bad debts are not submitted to the Council for approval to be written off except with the approval of the RFO and that the approvals are shown in the accounting records; and
  - measures to ensure that risk is properly managed.
- 1.13 The Council is not empowered by these Regulations or otherwise to delegate certain specified decisions. In particular any decision regarding:
- setting the final budget or the precept (Council tax requirement);
  - approving accounting statements;
  - approving an annual governance statement;
  - borrowing;
  - writing off bad debts;
  - declaring eligibility for the General Power of Competence; and
  - addressing recommendations in any report from the internal or external auditors, shall be a matter for the full Council only.

- 1.14 In addition, the Council must:
- determine and keep under regular review the bank mandate for all Council bank accounts;
  - approve any grant or a single commitment in excess of £30,000; and
  - in respect of the annual salary for any employee have regard to recommendations about annual salaries of employees.

- 1.15 In these financial regulations, references to the Accounts and Audit Regulations or 'the regulations' shall mean the regulations issued under the provisions of section 27 of the Audit Commission Act 1998, or any superseding legislation, and then in force unless otherwise specified.

In these financial regulations the term 'proper practice' or 'proper practices' shall refer to guidance issued in *Governance and Accountability for Local Councils - a Practitioners' Guide (England)* issued by the Joint Practitioners Advisory Group (JPAG), available from the websites of NALC and the Society for Local Council Clerks (SLCC).

## **2. Accounting and audit (internal and external)**

- 2.1 All accounting procedures and financial records of the Council shall be determined by the RFO in accordance with the Accounts and Audit Regulations, appropriate guidance and proper practices.
- 2.2 The RFO shall complete the annual statement of accounts, annual report, and any related documents of the Council contained in the Annual Return (as specified in proper practices) as soon as practicable after the end of the financial year and having certified the accounts shall submit them and report thereon to the Council within the timescales set by the Accounts and Audit Regulations.
- 2.3 The Council shall ensure that there is an adequate and effective system of internal audit of its accounting records, and of its system of internal control in accordance with proper practices. Any officer or member of the Council shall make available such documents and records as appear to the Council to be necessary for the purpose of the audit and shall, as directed by the Council, supply the RFO, internal auditor, or external auditor with such information and explanation as the Council considers necessary for that purpose.
- 2.4 The internal auditor shall be appointed by and shall carry out the work in relation to internal controls required by the Council in accordance with proper practices.
- 2.5 The internal auditor shall:
- be competent and independent of the financial operations of the Council;
  - report to Council in writing, or in person, on a regular basis with a minimum of one annual written report during each financial year;

- to demonstrate competence, objectivity, and independence, be free from any actual or perceived conflicts of interest, including those arising from family relationships; and
  - has no involvement in the financial decision making, management or control of the Council.
- 2.6 Internal or external auditors may not under any circumstances:
- perform any operational duties for the Council;
  - initiate or approve accounting transactions; or
  - direct the activities of any Council employee, except to the extent that such employees have been appropriately assigned to assist the internal auditor.
- 2.7 For the avoidance of doubt, in relation to internal audit the terms ‘independent’ and ‘independence’ shall have the same meaning as is described in proper practices.
- 2.8 The RFO shall make arrangements for the exercise of electors’ rights in relation to the accounts including the opportunity to inspect the accounts, books, and vouchers and display or publish any notices and statements of account required by Audit Commission Act 1998, or any superseding legislation, and the Accounts and Audit Regulations.
- 2.9 The RFO shall, without undue delay, bring to the attention of all councillors any correspondence or report from internal or external auditors.

### **3. Annual estimates (budget) and forward planning**

- 3.1 The RFO must each year, by no later than November prepare detailed estimates of all receipts and payments including the use of reserves and all sources of funding for the following financial year in the form of a budget to be considered by the Finance & Personnel Committee. After review a formal budget proposal will be prepared for review by Full Council.
- 3.2 The Council shall consider annual budget proposals in relation to the Council’s one year forecast of revenue and capital receipts and payments including recommendations for the use of reserves and sources of funding and update the forecast accordingly.
- 3.3 The Council shall fix the precept (Council tax requirement), and relevant basic amount of Council tax to be levied for the ensuing financial year not later than by the end of January each year. The RFO shall issue the precept to the billing authority and shall supply each member with a copy of the approved annual budget.
- 3.4 The approved annual budget shall form the basis of financial control for the ensuing year.

#### **4. Budgetary control and authority to spend**

4.1 Expenditure on revenue items may be authorised up to the amounts included for that class of expenditure in the approved budget. This authority is to be determined by:

- the Council for all items over £500
- Such authority is to be evidenced by a minute.

Contracts may not be disaggregated to avoid controls imposed by these regulations.

4.2 No expenditure may be incurred that will exceed the amount provided in the revenue budget for that class of expenditure unless there are compensating offsets within the individual department of the function budget. Any such virement will be brought before the Council at the next meeting. During the budget year and with the approval of Council having considered fully the implications for public services, unspent and available amounts may be moved to other budget headings or to an earmarked reserve as appropriate ('virement').

4.3 The salary budgets are to be reviewed annually.

4.4 In cases of extreme risk to the delivery of Council services, the clerk may authorise revenue expenditure on behalf of the Council which in the clerk's judgement it is necessary to carry out. Such expenditure includes repair, replacement or other work, whether or not there is any budgetary provision for the expenditure, subject to a limit of £1,000. The clerk shall report such action to the lead member for finance and the chairman as soon as possible and to the Council as soon as practicable thereafter.

4.5 Expenditure shall be authorised 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 and the requisite borrowing approval has been obtained.

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

4.7 The RFO shall regularly provide the Council with the accounts, including income and expenditure to date, on a quarterly basis. These statements are to be prepared at least at the end of each financial quarter and shall show explanations of material variances. Such statements will be presented to Full Council, when it next meets after the end of a quarter, by the lead member for finance.

Changes in earmarked reserves shall be approved by Council as part of the budgetary control process.

## **5. Banking arrangement and authorisation of payments**

- 5.1 The council's banking arrangements, including the bank mandate, shall be made by the RFO and approved by the council: banking arrangements may not be delegated to a committee. They shall be regularly reviewed for safety and efficiency.
- 5.2 The RFO shall prepare a report of payments made each month, which list will be presented to the Council at each meeting.
- 5.3 All invoices for payment shall be examined, verified and certified by the RFO to confirm that the work, goods or services to which each invoice relates has been received, carried out, examined and represents expenditure previously approved by the Council.
- 5.4 The RFO shall examine invoices for arithmetical accuracy. The RFO shall take all steps to pay all invoices submitted, and which are in order, at the next available Council meeting.
- 5.5 The Clerk and Chair shall have delegated authority to authorise the payment of items only in the following circumstances:
  - a) 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 clerk and Chair certify that there is no dispute or other reason to delay payment, provided that a list of such payments shall be submitted to the next appropriate meeting of Council.
  - b) Payments may be made by Councillors if previously authorized by two Councillors and the cost is within the budget level for that line item.
  - c) Payments will be reported to the full Council at the next possible meeting.
  - b) An expenditure item authorised under 5.6 below (continuing contracts and obligations) provided that a list of such payments shall be submitted to the next appropriate meeting of Council; or
  - c) Fund transfers within the Council's banking arrangements up to the sum of £10,000, provided that a list of such payments shall be submitted to the next appropriate meeting of Council.
- 5.6 For each financial year the RFO shall draw up a list of due payments which arise on a regular basis as the result of a continuing contract, statutory duty, or obligation (such as but not exclusively) Salaries, PAYE and NI and the like for which Council may authorise payment for the year provided that the requirements of regulation 4.1 (Budgetary Controls) are adhered to, provided also that a list of such payments shall be submitted to the next appropriate meeting of Council.
- 5.7 In respect of grants a duly authorised committee shall approve expenditure within any limits set by Council and in accordance with any policy statement approved by council. Any Revenue or Capital Grant shall, before payment, be subject to ratification by resolution of the council.

5.8 Members are subject to the Code of Conduct that has been adopted by the Council and shall comply with the Code and Standing Orders when a decision to authorise or instruct payment is made in respect of a matter in which they have a disclosable pecuniary or other interest, unless a dispensation has been granted.

## **6. Instructions for making of payments**

6.1 The Council will make safe and efficient arrangements for the making of its payments.

6.2 Following authorisation under Financial Regulation 5 above, the Council or, if so delegated, the RFO shall give instruction that a payment shall be made.

6.3 All payments shall be affected by means of BACS transfer, or other instructions to the council's bankers including by the use of cheque, in accordance with a resolution of Council.

6.4 Invoices to be paid by BACS transfer or cheque, or orders for payment drawn on the bank account, shall be signed by two members of Council. A member who is a bank signatory, having a connection by virtue of family or business relationships with the beneficiary of a payment, should not, under normal circumstances, be a signatory to the payment in question.

6.5 Cheques shall be signed by two members of the Council; BACS transfers for payments which have been agreed and signed by two members of the Council, will be arranged by the RFO and authorised by a member of the Council.

6.6 BACS Transfer lists, or cheques or orders for payment, shall not normally be presented for signature other than at a Full Council or Committee meeting (including immediately before or after such a meeting). Any signatures obtained away from such meetings shall be reported to the Council at the next convenient meeting.

6.7 If thought appropriate by the Council, payment for utility supplies (energy, telephone and water) and any National Non-Domestic Rates may be made by variable direct debit provided and any payments are reported to Council as made. The approval of the use of a variable direct debit shall be renewed by resolution of the Council at least every two years.

6.8 If thought appropriate by the Council, payment for certain items (principally salaries) may be made by banker's standing order provided that the instructions are signed, or otherwise evidenced by two members are retained and any payments are reported to Council as made. The approval of the use of a banker's standing order shall be renewed by resolution of the Council at least every two years.

6.9 If thought appropriate by the Council payment for certain items may be made by internet banking transfer provided members approved the payment.



- 6.10 No employee or Councillor shall disclose any PIN or password, relevant to the working of the Councillor its bank accounts, to any person not authorised.
- 6.11 Regular back-up copies of the records on any computer shall be made and shall be stored securely away from the computer in question.
- 6.12 The Council, and any members using computers for the Council's financial business, shall ensure that anti-virus, anti-spyware and firewall software with automatic updates, together with a high level of security, is used.
- 6.13 Where internet banking arrangements are made with any bank, the RFO shall be appointed as the Service Administrator. The bank mandate approved by the Council shall identify a number of Councillors who will be authorised to approve transactions on those accounts. The bank mandate will state clearly the amounts of payments that can be instructed by the Service Administrator with Councillor approval.
- 6.14 Access to any internet banking accounts will be directly to the access page (which may be saved under "favourites"), and not through a search engine or e-mail link. Remembered or saved passwords facilities must not be used on any computer used for Council banking work. Breach of this Regulation will be treated as a very serious matter under these regulations.
- 6.15 The RFO ensures cash received is banked. 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.
- 6.16 The RFO must reconcile each bank account on a monthly basis. All reconciliations should be viewed by the Lead Member for Finance. In addition the reconciliation must be reviewed and countersigned by another non-financial member every 6 months.

## **7. Payments of salaries**

- 7.1 As an employer, the Council shall make arrangements to meet fully the statutory requirements placed on all employers by PAYE and National Insurance legislation. The payment of all salaries shall be made in accordance with payroll records and the rules of PAYE and National Insurance currently operating, and salary rates shall be as agreed by Council.
- 7.2 Payment of salaries and payment of deductions from salary such as may be required to be made for tax, national insurance and pension contributions, or similar statutory or discretionary deductions must be made in accordance with the payroll records.
- 7.3 No changes shall be made to any employee's pay, emoluments, or terms and conditions of employment without the prior consent of both the Council and the employee.

- 7.4 Each and every payment to employees of salary shall be recorded in a separate confidential record. This confidential record is not open to inspection or review (under the Freedom of Information Act 2000 or otherwise) other than:
- a) by any councillor who can demonstrate a need to know;
  - b) by the internal auditor;
  - c) by the external auditor; or
  - d) by any person authorised under Audit Commission Act 1998, or any superseding legislation.

- 7.5 The total of such payments in each calendar month shall be reported with all other payments as made as may be required under these Financial Regulations, to ensure that only payments due for the period have actually been paid.

## **8. Loans and investments**

- 8.1 All borrowings shall be affected in the name of the Council, after obtaining any necessary borrowing approval. Any application for borrowing approval shall be approved by Council as to terms and purpose. The application for borrowing approval, and subsequent arrangements for the loan, shall only be approved by full Council.
- 8.2 Any financial arrangement which does not require formal borrowing approval from the Secretary of State (such as Hire Purchase or Leasing of tangible assets) shall be subject to approval by the full Council. In each case a report in writing shall be provided to Council in respect of value for money for the proposed transaction.
- 8.3 All loans and investments shall be negotiated in the name of the Council and shall be for a set period.
- 8.4 The Council shall consider the need for an Investment Strategy and Policy which, if drawn up, shall be in accordance with relevant regulations, proper practices and guidance. Any Strategy and Policy shall be reviewed by the Council at least annually.
- 8.5 All investments of money under the control of the Council shall be in the name of the Council.
- 8.6 All investment certificates and other documents relating thereto shall be retained in the custody of the RFO, or held in the library store.
- 8.7 Payments in respect of short term or long-term investments, including transfers between bank accounts held in the same bank, or branch, shall be made in accordance with Regulation 5 (Authorisation of payments) and Regulation 6 (Instructions for payments).

## **9. Income**

- 9.1 The collection of all sums due to the Council shall be the responsibility of and under the supervision of the RFO.
- 9.2 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.
- 9.3 The Council will review all fees and charges annually, following a report of the RFO.
- 9.4 Any sums found to be irrecoverable and any bad debts shall be reported to the Council and shall be written off in the year.
- 9.5 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.
- 9.6 The origin of each receipt shall be entered in the cashbook and where feasible the paying in slip is photocopied.
- 9.7 Personal cheques shall not be cashed out of money held on behalf of the Council.
- 9.8 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.
- 9.9 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.

## **10. Orders for work, goods and services**

- 10.1 An official order or letter shall be issued for all work, goods and services with value in excess of £500 unless a formal contract is to be prepared or an official order would be inappropriate. Copies of orders shall be retained.
- 10.2 All members and officers are responsible for obtaining value for money at all times.
- 10.3 A member may not issue an official order or make any contract on behalf of the Council, without prior authorisation.
- 10.4 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 and recorded in the minutes.

## 11. Contracts

### 11.1 Procedures as to contracts are laid down as follows:

- a) Every contract shall comply with these financial regulations, and no exceptions shall be made otherwise than in an emergency provided that this regulation need not apply to contracts which relate to items (i) to (vi) below:
  - i. for the supply of gas, electricity, water, sewerage and telephone services:
  - ii. for specialist services such as are provided by legal professionals acting in disputes:
  - iii. 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:
  - iv. for work to be executed or goods or materials to be supplied which constitute an extension of an existing contract by the Council:
  - v. for additional audit work of the external auditor up to an estimated value of £500 (in excess of this sum the RFO shall act after consultation with the Chairman and Vice Chairman of Council): and
  - vi. for goods or materials proposed to be purchased which are proprietary articles and / or are only sold at a fixed price.
- b) Where the Council intends to procure or award a public supply contract, public service contract or public works contract as defined by The Public Contracts Regulations 2015 (“the Regulations”) which is valued at £25,000 or more, the Council shall comply with the relevant requirements of the Regulations<sup>1</sup>.
- c) The full requirements of The Regulations, as applicable, shall be followed in respect of the tendering and award of a public supply contract, public service contract or public works contract which exceed thresholds in The Regulations set by the Public Contracts Directive 2014/24/EU (which may change from time to time).
- d) 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.
- e) Such invitation to tender shall state the general nature of the intended contract and the Clerk 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 Clerk in the ordinary course of post.
- f) All tenders shall be opened at the same time on the prescribed date by the Clerk in the presence of at least one member of Council.
- g) Any invitation to tender issued under this regulation shall be subject to Standing Orders and shall refer to the terms of the Bribery Act 2010.

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<sup>1</sup> The Regulations require councils to use the Contracts Finder website to advertise contract opportunities, set out the procedures to be followed in awarding new contracts and to publicise the award of new contracts

- h) When it is to enter into a contract of less than £25,000 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) Regulation 10.3 above shall apply.
- i) The Council shall not be obliged to accept the lowest or any tender, quote or estimate.
- j) Should it occur that the Council, does not accept any tender, quote or estimate, the work is not allocated and the Council requires further pricing, provided that the specification does not change, no person shall be permitted to submit a later tender, estimate or quote who was present when the original decision-making process was being undertaken.

## **12. Assets, properties and estates**

- 12.1 The Clerk shall make appropriate arrangements for the custody of all title deeds and Land Registry Certificates of properties held by the Council and ensure a record is maintained of all properties held by the Council shall be held in accordance with Accounts and Audit Regulations. Historical records are held in the library store.
- 12.2 No tangible moveable property shall be purchased or otherwise acquired, sold, leased or otherwise disposed of, without the authority of the Council, together with any other consents required by law, save where the estimated value of any one item of tangible movable property does not exceed £250.
- 12.3 No real property (interests in land) shall be sold, leased or otherwise disposed of without the authority of the Council, together with any other consents required by law. In each case a report in writing shall be provided to Council in respect of valuation and surveyed condition of the property (including matters such as planning permissions and covenants) together with a proper business case (including an adequate level of consultation with the electorate).
- 12.4 No real property (interests in land) shall be purchased or acquired without the authority of the full Council. In each case a report in writing shall be provided to Council in respect of valuation and surveyed condition of the property (including matters such as planning permissions and covenants) together with a proper business case (including an adequate level of consultation with the electorate).
- 12.5 Subject only to the limit set in Regulation 14.2 above, no tangible moveable property shall be purchased or acquired without the authority of the full Council. In each case a report in writing shall be provided to Council with a full business case.
- 12.6 The RFO shall ensure that an appropriate and accurate Register of Assets and Investments is kept up to date. The continued existence of tangible assets shown in the

Register shall be verified at least annually, possibly in conjunction with a health and safety inspection of assets.

**13. Insurance**

- 13.1 The RFO shall effect all insurances and negotiate all claims on the council's insurers.
- 13.2 The RFO shall keep a record of all insurances effected by the Council and annually review it.
- 13.3 All appropriate members and employees of the Council shall be included in a suitable form of security or fidelity guarantee insurance.

**14. Risk Management**

- 14.1 The Council is responsible for putting in place arrangements for the management of risk. The Clerk shall prepare, for approval by the council, risk management policy. Which shall be reviewed by the Council annually.

**15. Suspension and revision of Financial Regulations**

- 15.1 It shall be the duty of the Council to review the Financial Regulations of the Council from time to time. The Clerk shall make arrangements to monitor changes in legislation or proper practices and shall advise the Council of any requirement for a consequential amendment to these Financial Regulations.
- 15.2 The Council may, by resolution of the Council duly notified prior to the relevant meeting of Council, suspend any part of these Financial Regulations provided that reasons for the suspension are recorded and that an assessment of the risks arising has been drawn up and presented in advance to all members of Council.

Approved and agreed by Council

Date .....