

Darrington Parish Council

Model Financial Regulations

These Financial Regulations were adopted by the Council at its meeting on 8 February 2024.

Contents

1. General	2
2 Accounting and audit (internal and external)	4
3 Annual budget and forward planning	5
4 Budgetary control and authority to spend	6
5. Banking arrangements and authorisation of payments	7
6. Instructions for the making of payments	8
7. Loans and investments	9
8. Income	10
9. Orders for work, goods and services	11
10. Contracts	11
11. Assets, properties and estates	12
12. Insurance	13
13. Risk management	13
14. Suspension and revision of Financial Regulations	13

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
 - Identifying 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 may give rise to legal action.
- 1.7. Members of Council are expected to follow the instructions within these Regulations. 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.
- 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 account; and
 - Wherever relation, 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; and
- approve any grant or a single commitment in excess of [£500].

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.

1.16 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 On a regular basis, at least once in each quarter, and at each financial year end, a member other than the Chairman [or a cheque signatory] shall be appointed to verify bank reconciliations (for all accounts) produced by the RFO. The member shall sign the reconciliations and the original bank statements (or similar document) as evidence of verification. This activity shall on conclusion be reported, including any exceptions, to and noted by the Council.

2.3 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.

- 2.4 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.
- 2.5 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.
- 2.6 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;
 - demonstrate competence, objectivity and independence, be free from any actual or perceived conflicts of interest, including those arising from family relationships; and
 - have no involvement in the financial decision making, management or control of the Council.
- 2.7 Internal or external auditors may not under any circumstances:
- perform any operational duties for the Council; or
 - initiate or approve accounting transactions.
- 2.8 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.
- 2.9 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.
- 2.10 The RFO shall, without undue delay, bring to the attention of all Councillors any correspondence or report from internal or external auditors.

3 Annual budget and forward planning

- 3.1 The RFO must each year, by no later than December, 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 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; or
 - The RFO, in conjunction with the Chairman, for any items below £500.
- 4.2 Such authority is to be evidenced by a minute duly signed by the Chairman.
- 4.3 Contracts may not be disaggregated to avoid controls imposed by these regulations.
- 4.4 No expenditure may be authorised that will exceed the amount provided in the revenue budget for that class of expenditure other than by resolution of the Council, or duly delegated committee. 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').
- 4.5 Unspent provisions in the revenue or capital budgets for completed projects shall not be carried forward to a subsequent year.
- 4.6 No 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.
- 4.7 All capital works shall be administered in accordance with the Council's standing orders and financial regulations relating to contracts.
- 4.8 The RFO shall monthly provide the Council with a statement of receipts and payments to date under each head of the budgets, comparing actual expenditure to the appropriate date against that planned as shown in the budget. These statements shall show explanations of material variances. For this purpose "material" shall be in excess of 15% of the budget.
- 4.9 Changes in earmarked reserves shall be approved by Council as part of the budgetary control process.

5. Banking arrangements 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 schedule of payments requiring authorisation, forming part of the Agenda for the Meeting and present the schedule to Council. The Council shall review the schedule for compliance and, having satisfied itself shall authorise payment by a resolution of the Council. A detailed list of all payments shall be disclosed within or as an attachment to the minutes of the meeting at which payment was authorised. Personal payments may be summarised to remove public access to any personal information.
- 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 and analyse them to the appropriate expenditure heading. 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 RFO shall have delegated authority to authorise the payment of items only in the following circumstances:
 - 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 RFO certifies 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; or
 - 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.
- 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 regular maintenance contracts and the like for which the 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 A record of regular payments made under 5.6 above shall be drawn up and be signed by two members on each and every occasion when payment is authorised – thus controlling the risk of duplicated payments being authorised and / or made.
- 5.8. In respect of grants the Council shall approve expenditure within the limits set by Council and in accordance with any policy statement approved by Council.

- 5.9. 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.
- 5.10 Any changes in the recorded details of suppliers, such as bank account records, shall be approved in writing by a Member.

6. Instructions for the 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 shall give instruction that a payment shall be made.
- 6.3. Payments shall be affected by electronic transfer or cheque to the Council's bankers, or otherwise, in accordance with a resolution of Council.
- 6.4. Cheques or orders for payment drawn on the bank account in accordance with the schedule as presented to Council or committee shall be signed by two members of Council in accordance with a resolution instructing that payment. 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 or orders for payment shall not normally be presented for signature other than at a Council 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.
- 6.6. If thought appropriate by the Council, payment for certain items may be made by banker's standing order provided that the instructions are signed by two members 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.
- 6.7. If thought appropriate by the Council, payment for certain items may be made by BACS or CHAPS methods provided that the instructions for each payment are signed, or otherwise evidenced, by two authorised bank signatories, are retained and any payments are reported to Council as made. The approval of the use of BACS or CHAPS 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 may be made by internet banking transfer provided evidence is retained showing which members approved the payment.
- 6.9. Where a computer requires use of a personal identification number (PIN) or other password(s), for access to the Council's records on that computer, a note shall be made of the PIN and Passwords and shall be provided to and retained by the

Chairman of Council. This will not be required for a member's personal computer used only for remote authorisation of bank payments.

- 6.10. No employee or Councillor shall disclose any PIN or password, relevant to the working of the Council or its bank accounts, to any person not authorised in writing by the Council or a duly delegated committee.
- 6.11. Regular back-up copies of the records on any computer shall be made and shall be stored securely in the cloud.
- 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 use of the Service Administrator alone, or by the Service Administrator with a stated number of approvals.
- 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. Changes to account details for suppliers, which are used for internet banking may only be changed on written hard copy notification by the supplier and supported by hard copy authority for change signed by the RFO.
- 6.16. Any Debit Card issued for use will be specifically restricted to the RFO and will also be restricted to a single transaction maximum value of £500 unless authorised by the Council in writing before any order is placed.
- 6.17. A pre-paid debit card may be issued to Councillors with varying limits. These limits will be set by the Council and transactions and purchases made will be reported to the Council and authority for topping-up shall be at the discretion of the Council.
- 6.18. The Council will not maintain any form of cash float. All cash received must be banked intact. Any payments made in cash by the RFO or a Member shall be refunded on a regular basis, at least quarterly.

7. Loans and investments

- 7.1. 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.

- 7.2. 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.
- 7.3. The Council will arrange with the Council's banks and investment providers for the sending of a copy of each statement of account to the Chairman of the Council at the same time as one is issued to the RFO.
- 7.4. All loans and investments shall be negotiated in the name of the Council and shall be for a set period in accordance with Council policy.
- 7.5. 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.
- 7.6. All investments of money under the control of the Council shall be in the name of the Council.
- 7.7. All investment certificates and other documents relating thereto shall be retained in the custody of the RFO.
- 7.8. 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).

8. Income

- 8.1. The collection of all sums due to the Council shall be the responsibility of and under the supervision of the RFO.
- 8.2. 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.
- 8.3. The Council will review all fees and charges at least annually, following a report of the RFO.
- 8.4. Any sums found to be irrecoverable and any bad debts shall be reported to the Council and shall be written off in the year.
- 8.5. 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.
- 8.6. The origin of each receipt shall be entered on the paying-in slip.
- 8.7. Personal cheques shall not be cashed out of money held on behalf of the Council.

- 8.8. The RFO shall promptly complete any VAT Return that is required. Any repayment claim due in accordance with the VAT Act 1994 section 33 shall be made at least annually coinciding with the financial year end.
- 8.9. 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.

9. Orders for work, goods and services

- 9.1. A purchase order shall be issued for all work, goods and services unless a formal contract is to be prepared. Copies of orders shall be retained.
- 9.2. Order books shall be controlled by the RFO.
- 9.3. All members and officers are responsible for obtaining value for money at all times. An officer issuing a purchase order above £1,000 shall ensure as far as reasonable and practicable that the best available terms are obtained in respect of each transaction, by obtaining three or more quotations or estimates from appropriate suppliers.
- 9.4. A member may not issue a purchase order or make any contract on behalf of the Council.
- 9.5. 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 so that the minutes can record the power being used.

10. Contracts

10.1. 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 specialist services such as are provided by legal professionals acting in disputes;
 - ii. 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;

- iii. for work to be executed or goods or materials to be supplied which constitute an extension of an existing contract by the Council; and
- v. for additional audit work of the external auditor up to an estimated value of £200 (in excess of this sum the RFO shall act after consultation with the Chairman and Vice Chairman of Council).

11. Assets, properties and estates

- 11.1. The RFO shall ensure a record is maintained of all properties held by the Council, recording the location, extent, plan, reference, purchase details, nature of the interest, and purpose for which held in accordance with Accounts and Audit Regulations.
- 11.2. 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 £100.
- 11.3. 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).
- 11.4. 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).
- 11.5. Subject only to the limit set in Regulation 11.2 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.
- 11.6. 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.

12. Insurance

- 12.1. Following the annual risk assessment (per Regulation 17), the RFO shall effect all insurances and negotiate all claims on the Council's insurers.
- 12.2. The RFO shall keep a record of all insurances effected by the Council and the property and risks covered thereby and annually review it.
- 12.3. The RFO shall be notified of any loss liability or damage or of any event likely to lead to a claim and shall report these to Council at the next available meeting.
- 12.3. All appropriate members of the Council shall be included in a suitable form of security or fidelity guarantee insurance which shall cover the maximum risk exposure as determined annually by the Council, or duly delegated committee.

13. Risk management

- 13.1. The Council is responsible for putting in place arrangements for the management of risk. An appointed Member of the Council shall prepare, for approval by the Council, risk management policy statements in respect of all activities of the Council. Risk policy statements and consequential risk management arrangements shall be reviewed by the Council at least annually.
- 13.2. When considering any new activity, the appointed Member of the Council shall prepare a draft risk assessment including risk management proposals for consideration and adoption by the Council.

14. Suspension and revision of Financial Regulations

- 14.1. It shall be the duty of the Council to review the Financial Regulations of the Council from time to time. The RFO 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.
- 14.2. 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.