

ASHINGTON TOWN COUNCIL

FINANCIAL AND MANAGEMENT RISK ASSESSMENT

This risk assessment systematically examines the Town Council’s working practices, enabling the Council to identify all potential risks inherent in its financial and management systems. Based upon a completed assessment, the Council can take the practical and necessary steps specified to control, reduce, or eliminate the risks. The risk assessment enables the Town Council to assess the risks that it faces and satisfy itself that it has taken all reasonable steps to minimise them. The risk assessment specifies the controls in place and identifies further controls required.

The risk rating balances the likelihood of a given risk with impact of the risk in question and results in an overall risk rating. RED (not acceptable), AMBER (acceptable/action required), GREEN (acceptable/no action required)

This Risk Assessment is produced in accordance with the requirements of Regulation 4 of the Audit and Accounts Regulations 2003, as amended by the 2006 Regulations. It is a working document that is continually reviewed and updated.

Received at the Full Council Meeting on, 25th June 2024; (Further scheduled reviews September 2024, January 2025, May 2025)

		Likelihood			
		1 Unlikely	2 Possible	3 Probable	4 Highly Probable
Impact	1 Minor				
	2 Moderate				
	3 Serious				
	4 Major				



FINANCIAL	Impact	Likelihood	Risk Rating	Controls in Place	Additional Controls Required (or for consideration)
Allotment site Mgt transferred back to Council	2	3	6	<p>The Council previously absorbed some of the costs of leased sites, therefore costs associated with directly managing the sites are expected to be manageable with the direct income from allotment rents.</p> <p>Capital jobs are part of budget process, and funds agreed according to priorities.</p> <p>Maintenance costs to be agreed according to budget available and on a priority basis.</p> <p>Water use, skips and clearance are the most likely concern in regards expenditure.</p>	<p>Enforcement on water usage and bringing waste onto site to reduce water bills and use of skips.</p> <p>Rating will be updated following the Council's mgt and employment of Allots Officer.</p>
Debtors not followed up promptly	1	1	1	<p>Officers are responsible for following up any invoices they have issued.</p> <p>New system introduced in 2023/24 – all invoices are controlled from the same spreadsheet.</p> <p>We have further reduced the likelihood of debtors with a SumUp card payment reader.</p>	
Spending not allocated to correct budget heading, or not committed at the time of approval. At the year end the impact could be significant as committed spending is used to calculate balances	2	2	4	<p>Approval for spending is sought via Council meetings, therefore a minute reference is available, and commitment in the accounts is part of the action points following the meeting.</p> <p>Spending that is within delegated powers of Clerk/Chair has an email trail, and commitment in the accounts should be made on approval.</p> <p>New system introduced in 2023/24 – all orders require a purchase order and will be controlled from the same spreadsheet, with reference to cost code (budget heading) and approval reference. Monthly process of copying across PO's to budget commitment.</p>	

Precept Demand Inadequate due to error or reluctance to increase	3	1	<p>3</p> <p>Prior to the January budget meeting of the full council the Clerk/RFO will have carried out the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - identified all committed spending expected for the remainder of the year - identified any income expected or accounts unpaid - estimated any income for the remainder of the year - checked all committed spending to ensure nothing is missing <p>Using the balances available at the start of the year, minus spending + income, the Clerk/RFO can forecast year end balances/reserves.</p> <p>The Council agrees the budget and the required precept based on the forthcoming plans of the Council.</p> <p>Budget and expenditure are monitored monthly.</p> <p>General Reserves and Contingency held.</p> <p>Asset Reserve calculated according to lifespan of assets and expected replacement plans.</p>	<p>Town Council to develop aims and objectives through community engagement and preparation of a business/action plan.</p> <p>By having short/medium/long term planning in place, it will allow longer term budget planning.</p>
Council overspend	2	1	<p>2</p> <p>Areas of spending are closely monitored by the Clerk/RFO and reported to the full council monthly.</p> <p>Financial Regulations do not allow spending that is not budgeted for, and spending is limited within these regulations and agreed by a meeting of the Council.</p> <p>The Clerk/RFO ensures that all committed spending is input into the budget, as far as possible, prior to setting the budget in January.</p> <p>General Reserves and Contingency held.</p>	
Council overspends because of external salary negotiations	1	3	<p>3</p> <p>Continue to keep updated on negotiations. Bring budget movement or suggested funds from contingency when agreed.</p>	

Incomplete or inaccurate financial records	1	1	1	<p>The Clerk/RFO has a system set up on excel that contains a cashbook and summary of budget spending.</p> <p>The Council complies with Governance and Accountability for Smaller Authorities in England and has published Financial Regulations.</p>	<p>Two Cllrs to carry out a review of internal controls, as required by audit, at the year end.</p> <p>The internal auditor could carry out an interim review of records, prior to the year end.</p>
Breach of Financial Regulations	3	1	3	<p>The Clerk/RFO has overall responsibility for the financial affairs of the Council and is qualified to advise. All Members and Officers are required to comply with Financial Regulations; these are readopted each year. All spending is supported by the appropriate legal power to pay.</p> <p>New system was introduced in 2023/24 – all orders require a purchase order, and all spending levels have an element of control with the Financial Regulations.</p>	<p>All Officers and Members can complete ILCA and access further training.</p> <p>Financial Training offered via NALC to Cllrs.</p>
Damage/loss/theft of Town Council assets	2	2	4	<p>All assets are listed in a comprehensive asset register and are insured.</p> <p>The Council employs two Neighbourhood Service Officers who can make immediate repairs on many assets, when this is not possible trusted local contractors are used.</p> <p>Clerk is seeking legal agreement for assets for which responsibility has been transferred from NCC to ATC, i.e. play areas, bus shelters, litter bins and seats.</p>	<p>Develop an Assets Inspection Policy, inspection regime and Risk Assessment template for assets.</p>
Grant Funding usage – due diligence	3	2	6	<p>All Grant Aid applications detail why Grant Aid is being requested and include the group constitution, and required policies. New policy adopted in April 2022, including Small Grants.</p> <p>Applications are not put forward where policies have not been provided.</p> <p>Checks increase with new applications. Organisations receiving Annual Grant Funding over £5,000 make regular reports to Town Council meeting. Presentations from those seeking £3,000+</p>	<p>If ATC wish to fund CIC's or other that are not governed by the Charity Commission, or with Constitution, they can seek articles of association to ascertain view of profit.</p> <p>Develop more specific guidelines.</p>

Incorrect VAT claim/Non-compliance	1	1	1	<p>VAT is reclaimed using the cashbook which is reconciled every month against the bank statement. VAT is checked by the internal auditor at year end.</p> <p>Clerk has completed VAT training for Town Councils.</p>	Interim internal audit.
Insurance inadequate	2	2	4	<p>The assets register is reviewed annually as part of the AGAR, and when cashbook purchases are added.</p> <p>The cashbook has been updated to include an extra checkbox for assets that need to be added to register.</p>	<p>Develop an Assets Inspection Policy, inspection regime and Risk Assessment template for assets.</p> <p>Check the insurable value of assets like Mining Wheel and Memorial Garden.</p>
Banking errors	1	2	2	<p>The Council has Financial Regulations setting out the requirements for banking, cheques, and the reconciliation of accounts.</p> <p>Payments go through a 3-stage process, RFO/Cllr 1/ Cllr 2 and all payments are currently by BACS.</p> <p>Any errors in processing payments are discovered when the bank accounts are reconciled every month. These are dealt with immediately.</p>	
Inadequate reserves and safeguarding reserves for intended purposes	2	3	6	<p>Funds are transferred to support capital works, and additions to the fund are approved as part of the budget process at the start of the financial year. There is a separate annual resolution approving the Earmarked Asset Reserve Fund that makes clear that the Fund is reserved for the funding of approved capital works only.</p> <p>A General Reserve Fund and Earmarked Reserve Fund has been established. Capital projects that are being saved for to be restricted as such in the earmarked reserves and with an unrestricted contingency fund.</p> <p>Proposal for the use of any fund is subject to a resolution by the Full Council, as per standing orders.</p>	<p>Pressure on budgets and to minimise increases in the precept puts pressure on funds held outside of the budget.</p> <p>In the draft budget for 24/25 plans for funding towards play areas were scaled back which means external funding is required, or replacements will need to be saved for over a longer term.</p>

Excessive underspend at the year end	1	2	<p>2</p> <p>Planning and prioritising operational plans will maximise spending plans being realised.</p> <p>The Clerk/RFO has included a full half-year review on September FGS Committee with recommendations for budget movement.</p> <p>Budget reviews are carried out throughout the year and where it is unlikely that funding allocated will be spent, the Council is asked to consider alternative spending plans.</p>	
Unknown budget costs due to taking on assets or responsibilities without due diligence	3	2	<p>6</p> <p>The council should consider working with experienced partners but must protect their own interests. The Clerk has completed training on asset transfers.</p> <p>Where asset transfers are expected, a separate Risk Assessment is carried out by the Clerk/RFO.</p> <p>The Clerk will seek professionally indemnified reports on the condition of any assets expected to be transferred, including repairs carried out, in advance of the Council taking a decision.</p> <p>The insurance arrangements for any asset transfer are sought directly from the Council's insurer. Ongoing costs are sought in advance of liability transferring. A legal agreement must exist to establish responsibility for an asset.</p> <p>All decisions are taken in the public domain and subject to the usual financial regulations of the council.</p> <p>The Clerk advises the Council to pay for professional advice whenever necessary, ensuring professional indemnity guarantees.</p>	<p>The controls listed are in place, but it is noted that in regards Play Areas, this is lacking and is being progressed in consultation with NCC and our insurers.</p> <p>Engage in community consultation prior to taking on assets for which there will be on-going costs and commitments.</p>

GOVERNANCE	Impact	Likelihood	Risk Rating	Controls in Place	Additional Controls Required (or for consideration)
Breach of standing orders	2	2	4	<p>Standing Orders are adopted each year and Cllrs are issued with a copy. This is part of an induction for new Cllrs.</p> <p>Where it is thought that Standing Orders have been breached, external written advice is sought and presented. If the breach is proven, any decisions would be revisited.</p> <p>Clerk is CiLCA qualified.</p>	Clerk requested to devise training on meeting etiquette.
Members fail to behave in accordance with Code of Conduct	2	2	4	<p>The Code of Conduct is adopted by the council at the Annual Meeting each year, members are provided with a copy, including new Cllrs at induction.</p> <p>Cllrs can attend training for Councillors on Code of Conduct and Behaviour in Public Office.</p> <p>All Cllrs sign a declaration of acceptance of office, which includes the Code of Conduct.</p> <p>Cllrs and members of the public are advised that Code of Conduct Complaints should be made to the Monitoring Officer. As a result, sanctions for failure to comply are out of the Council's control.</p> <p>Council has adopted a social media policy.</p>	<p>Consider further training on Civility & respect and signing up to pledge.</p> <p>Clerk requested to devise training on meeting etiquette.</p>
Agenda not issued/published correctly	2	1	2	<p>Agendas for all Town Council full and committee meetings are published on the Town Council website and issued to members three clear days in advance.</p> <p>Agendas are agreed with the chair prior to publication.</p> <p>All meetings of the Council are held in accordance with the law, and proper practice.</p>	

				Terms of reference are agreed for all additional meetings/groups/committees.	
Conflict of interest not declared or dealt with appropriately	1	1	1	All members complete a declaration of interests form at the outset of the political term. 'Declarations of interest' is the second item on every agenda which acts as a reminder.	DOI to be reviewed at the Annual Meeting each year
Council meeting not quorate or not minuted properly	2	1	2	Attendance recorded as part of minute taking to evidence quorum. Where quorum is not achieved, Clerk would declare the meeting could not take place. Minutes are published on TC website as required.	
'Best value' principles and accountability	2	2	4	Specifications for works or supply of goods is drawn up by the Clerk or Assets and Facilities Manager. Model Financial Regulations have been adopted.	
STAFFING					
	Impact	Likelihood	Risk Rating	Controls in Place	Additional Controls Required (or for consideration)
Capacity issues managing allotment sites	2	2	4	Work with allotment associations undertaken. Three additional sites under direct management. The staggered nature has helped absorb the additional work with new Allotment Officer but work and role are new and subject to change. Planned take-over by the Council brought forward to ease tensions on sites and at the will of existing associations. Officers working together to minimise disruption and ease transition from association to council.	Further considerations will be observed moving forward. Improvements made with card payments taken, and database of tenants.
Incorrect grades for staff	3	1	3	Job descriptions are drawn up in consultation with staff and evaluated using the NALC/SLCC guidelines.	Benchmark with other 'like' Councils.

				Open door policy for discussions about roles.	Short/medium/long term planning would allow strategic staffing response and review of roles.
Inadequate training	3	2	6	<p>Members are responsible for their own development and are sent training opportunities via NALC, NCC and other local training providers.</p> <p>Clerk can deliver training as requested, or source training elsewhere according to the needs of members.</p> <p>Clerk is CiLCA qualified, and all 4/6 staff have completed ILCA.</p> <p>Clerk is following a programme of continuing professional development.</p> <p>Training & Development ongoing. Annual Reviews of staff. Staff have record of training and development plans.</p>	<p>Record Members training and seek training where required.</p> <p>Little training is available locally, consider collaborative approach with neighbouring Councils.</p>
Lone Working	3	2	6	<p>Building is secure, only tenants have access to floors.</p> <p>Lone Worker out on site, ensures personal safety with a risk-assessed approach to working. Mobile phones used.</p> <p>Lone Worker ensures personal safety by contacting home when leaving the building, if at night.</p> <p>Shared Google calendar used by Council staff.</p> <p>Regular communication between office and on-site officers.</p>	<p>Investigate additional controls.</p> <p>Personal safety training.</p>
Anxiety and Stress due to the cost-of-living crisis	2	2	4	<p>Salaries, pay, holidays, working hours and benefits are governed and negotiated in accordance with the National Joint Council (NJC).</p> <p>We continue to ensure that staff are on the appropriate grade, as this is within the Council's control. Council is a Living Wage employer, and all staff have incremental as well as cost of living increases.</p>	<p>Let staff know where they can get free, confidential, and independent money and debt advice from the government's Money and Pensions Service.</p> <p>Normalise conversations about money worries at work; showing concern and empathy</p>

					can help to break down any stigma.
HEALTH & SAFETY & LEGAL	Impact	Likelihood	Risk Rating	Controls in Place	Additional Controls Required (or for consideration)
Members of the public, staff or Cllrs injured, at ATC office, event or on land owned or leased by the Council	3	2	6	<p>Public and employer's liability insurance in place which covers Cllrs and volunteers at events. All those attending events to show PLI. Risk assessments are carried out for all TC events. Sharon completed training on 'How to Organise Safe Events' as part of CPD.</p> <p>All staff and members to be made aware of their health and safety responsibilities. Health & Safety Policy agreed, as well as safe working guidelines.</p> <p>Asbestos is greatest risk, and we have a separate asbestos management plan.</p>	<p>Inspection Regime and RA policy, for all assets.</p> <p>Clerk seeking legal agreement for those assets for which responsibility has been transferred to the Council from NCC, i.e. play areas, bus shelters, seats, and bins.</p>
Members of the public, staff or Cllrs suffer loss because of negligent behaviour on the part of the Council	2	2	4	<p>Risk Assessment carried out for all potential activity/decision making or as issues arise.</p> <p>Advice is always sought from suitably qualified professionals, with professional indemnity.</p> <p>Insurance made aware of any potential claim at the earliest opportunity.</p> <p>Health & Safety Policies adopted for all activities of the Council, including those within the role of NSO's. Risk Assessments for all NSO tasks and responsibilities.</p> <p>Asbestos Management Plan in place.</p>	
Health, Safety and Welfare of staff	2	2	4	NSO's – professional advice was sought and implemented on requirements for health checks in role, and welfare facilities.	Ergonomic considerations are considered in regards office space.

				<p>Staff have been advised of employer's obligation to pay for eye test and glasses if required for screen work, or to do job.</p> <p>Uniform and PPE provided, as required. Flexible approach to working hours and annual leave. Green book sickness policy., Emergency contact forms held.</p>	
Health & Safety, and liability risk due to taking on assets without due diligence	3	2	6	(See identical financial risk above)	
Loss of data	2	2	4	<p>All systems are securely backed up.</p> <p>Due to compliance, a wealth of ATC information is available on-line and therefore is uploaded onto the Town Council website.</p> <p>Signed paper copies of all TC minutes are held on file.</p> <p>Data & Retention Policy adopted.</p>	
Excessive Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) Requests	1	2	2	<p>In view of the information available on the website, minimal additional information is likely to be requested. Frequent requesters could be referred to website.</p> <p>All information required in the Transparency Code is available on the Town Council website. Model Transparency Code Adopted.</p>	Further Staff Training
Breach of data protection	2	1	2	<p>Data Protection Policy adopted.</p> <p>Town Council specific email addresses are available for all Councillors.</p> <p>Council's CCTV provider is fully compliant and willing to answer concerns from residents.</p>	Staff and Member Training Required

Breach of data protection by members of Allotment Associations	3	3	9	Current controls are unknown.	Training Required
Safeguarding issues on allotment sites, recipients of Grant Aid, members of the public in contact or other	3	2	6	Safeguarding Policy in place. Grant Aid recipients to share their own safeguarding policy. All staff and Cllrs to be aware of Safeguarding Procedure.	All staff to receive training in safeguarding. Allotment Sites to be included in Council's Safeguarding procedure.
Claim of statutory nuisance in respect of fires on allotments.	2	3	6	Allotment Bonfire Rules are in place and enforced by Allotment Associations, and Council. Reports of nuisance fires are recorded and investigated. Management Agreements, Association Tenancy Agreements and Allotment Tenancy Agreements have been developed in consultation with Allotment Associations, this includes rules on bonfires on allotments. NCC have the statutory responsibility to investigate complaints of statutory nuisance in the form of smoke.	Be clearer about the interpretation of 'nuisance fire'. Work with allotment associations and neighbours to allotment sites to tighten the rules to reduce the risk of fires being considered a nuisance. Allotment Officer presence on-site should reduce any contraventions of policy.
Potential injuries or accidents stemming from the assembly and installation of bird box kits distributed by the Council as part of its climate change initiative	1	2	2	Members of the public could suffer falls, lacerations or other injuries while constructing or mounting the bird boxes, exposing the Council to liability and reputational damage. While the Council provides the bird box kits, the responsibility for conducting risk assessments and following safe working practices rests with the recipients/community groups undertaking the making and installations. Safe working guidelines and instructions are included with each kit, outlining recommended safety precautions. However, a clear disclaimer stating that recipients bear full responsibility for their own	

				health and safety in assembling and installing the boxes and must carry out their own risk assessment.	
Individuals being accidentally locked inside allotment sites due to gates being secured, leading to entrapment situation, which could result in distress, potential injury, and liability for the Council and/or not being able to access animals	3	2	6	<p>Allotment sites have different procedures in place.</p> <p>Some allotment gates are kept unlocked during daytime hours when sites are likely to have visitors/tenants present. Some are always locked and users have keys, others locked dusk till dawn.</p> <p>Regular inspections verify that gates are operating properly and not posing entrapment hazards</p> <p>All sites can be left on foot without the risk of entrapment.</p>	<p>Clear signage instructs allotment users to be aware of closing times and ensure they exit before gates are locked.</p> <p>Emergency contact information is posted on all allotment gates and sites in case anyone becomes accidentally trapped and needs assistance.</p> <p>Allotment holders issued with a key (deposit payable).</p>
Plot holders being unable to access allotment sites due to locked gates, which could endanger any animals (livestock, poultry, etc.) housed at their plots by preventing adequate care and feeding which could result in animal distress, suffering, or loss of livestock/poultry exposing the Council to potential liabilities.	4	2	8	As above.	As above.

REPUTATION	Impact	Likelihood	Risk Rating	Controls in Place	Additional Controls required
Adverse press/social media coverage	2	2	4	<p>Public and press welcome to attend council meetings, all decisions taken in public domain and reported professionally and without bias.</p> <p>Where controversial Council decisions are taken, Clerk to issue PR as a matter of priority.</p> <p>Social Media and Email Policy adopted.</p> <p>Good working relationship with local reporters.</p>	<p>Members to inform Clerk of any negativity on social media so this can be dealt with appropriately.</p> <p>Cllrs encouraged to share official Town Council posts rather than posting individual posts regarding town council decisions.</p>
Lack of community engagement	2	2	4	<p>The Council seeks ways to interact with the community via events, and with public meetings. Town Council office is open to the public.</p> <p>Website is engaging and informative. ½ page in every ABC Wansbeck and North Seaton Directory as well as regular editorials.</p>	<p>Surveys Events Annual Report distributed</p>
Adverse relationship with Northumberland County Council	2	2	4	<p>Regular two-way communication with local officers at neighbourhood level and with County Councillors.</p> <p>Issues raised with County Officers via the Town Council Office.</p> <p>Local Charter reviewed and adopted. Rep on NALC County Committee and Town & Parish Liaison Working Group.</p>	<p>NALC reviewing communication between T&P Councils and County Cllrs.</p>
Council directly managing allotment sites may not be perceived as positive by some	2	2	4	<p>Recognise that change is feared by some, any disruption to the status quo can have a negative impact, even if it is necessary and for the better.</p> <p>Open and regular communication with allotment tenants alongside an understanding of concerns and fears as we move away from the status quo to formal agreements.</p>	<p>To be updated once changes are agreed/implemented.</p>

				Implement any necessary changes in keeping with allotment laws and with respect to custom and practice, taking small steps according to priorities.	
Perception of lack of diversity in decision-making due to a single-party majority on the Council	1	2	2	The Council has adopted a Co-option Policy that outlines a fair and open process for filling vacant seats between elections, and where no election is called following a casual vacancy. In keeping with LGA 1972 and the Council's standing orders, each councillor has an equal vote in the co-option process, upholding principles of democracy.	
Negative public perception and concerns over privacy related to the installation of new CCTV cameras	2	3	6	CCTV and Council officers to offer reassurance to members of the public that the cameras are used solely for legitimate public safety purposes in accordance with data protection and human rights legislation. Clear public communications have outlined the reasons for the CCTV installation and the strict policies and safeguards in place to prevent any abuse or unauthorised access or monitoring of the footage. CCTV provider has welcomed questions from members of the public and explained screening	CCTV Policy