

MILTON ABBOT GROUPED PARISH COUNCIL
FINANCIAL REGULATIONS

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These Financial Regulations were adopted by the Council at its Meeting held on 5th November 2014

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.
- 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.
- 1.3. The Council's accounting control systems must include measures:
 - for the timely production of accounts;
 - for the management of risk;
 - for the safe and efficient safeguarding of public money;
 - to prevent and detect inaccuracy and fraud.
- 1.4. These financial regulations demonstrate how the Council meets those responsibilities and requirements.
- 1.5. At least once a year, prior to approving the Annual Governance Statement contained in the Audit Commission Annual Return, the Council must review the effectiveness of its system of internal control which shall be in accordance with proper practices.
- 1.6. A breach of these Regulations by an employee is gross misconduct.
- 1.7. 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.
- 1.8. 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;
 - produces financial management information as required by the Council.
- 1.9. 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.
- 1.10. 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.

- 1.11. 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;
 - procedures to ensure that uncollectable amounts, including any bad debts are not submitted to the Council for approval to be written off except by the RFO and that the approvals are shown in the accounting records; and
 - measures to ensure that risk is properly managed.
- 1.12. 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;
 - addressing recommendations in any report from the internal or external auditors,
- shall be a matter for the full Council only.
- 1.13. 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 £500
- 1.14. 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)

2. ACCOUNTING AND AUDIT (INTERNAL AND EXTERNAL)

- 2.1. All accounting procedures and financial records of the Council shall be maintained 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 Chair 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;
 - to 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;
 - 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.
- 2.8. 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 October, 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 including recommendations for the use of reserves, and shall fix the precept 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.
- 3.3. The Council shall consider annual budget proposals in relation to the council's three 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.

- 3.4. The approved annual budget shall form the basis of financial control for the ensuing year.

4. BUDGETARY CONTROL AND AUTHORITY TO SPEND

- 4.1. The Clerk, in conjunction with Chair and Vice-Chair of the Council, may incur expenditure on behalf of the Council up to a maximum of £500, in cases where the Clerk deems the matter to be of such urgency that action must be taken before the next meeting of the Council and it is inappropriate to call a special meeting of the Council. Such expenditure includes repair, replacement or other work, whether or not there is any budgetary provision for that expenditure.

Such action must be reported to the next meeting of the Council.

- 4.2. Subject to 4.1 above, 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.
- 4.3. During the budget year and with the approval of Council, having considered fully the implications for other services, unspent and available amounts may be moved to other budget headings or to an earmarked reserve, as appropriate ('virement').
- 4.4. The salary budgets are to be reviewed at least annually in October for the following financial year.
- 4.5. 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 or 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 a statement of receipts and payments to date, comparing actual expenditure to the appropriate date against that planned as shown in the budget. These statements are to be prepared at least at the end of each financial quarter and shall show explanations of material variances. For this purpose "material" shall be in excess of [£100] or [15%] of the budget.
- 4.8. 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. They shall be regularly reviewed for security and efficiency.
- 5.2. The RFO shall prepare a schedule of payments requiring authorisation, forming part of the Agenda for the Meeting and, together with the relevant invoices, present the schedule to the Council. The Council shall review the schedule for compliance and having satisfied itself, shall authorise payment by a resolution of the Council. The approved schedule shall be ruled off and initialled by the Chair of the Meeting. 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. Such payments will not include the monthly or quarterly, as appropriate, instalments of the agreed salary of the Clerk, but will include payment of the Clerk's expenses.

- 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:
 - 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 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 the Council.
 - b) With the concurrence of the two bank signatories, 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 the Council.
- 5.6. 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 THE MAKING OF PAYMENTS

- 6.1. All payments shall be made by cheque or other instructions to the Council's bankers, or otherwise, in accordance with a resolution of Council.
- 6.2. Cheques or orders for payment drawn on the bank account in accordance with the schedule as presented to Council shall be signed by two members of Council in accordance with a resolution instructing that payment. If a member who is also a bank signatory has declared a disclosable pecuniary interest, or has any other interest, in the matter in respect of which the payment is being made, that Councillor shall be required to consider Standing Orders, and thereby determine whether it is appropriate or permissible to be a signatory to the transaction in question. If in such circumstances, the need arises to appoint another bank signatory on a temporary basis, the RFO may make such an appointment, provided it is reported to the next meeting of the Council.
- 6.3. To indicate agreement of the details shown on the cheque or order for payment with the counterfoil and the invoice or similar documentation, the signatories shall each also initial the cheque counterfoil.
- 6.4. Payment of salaries may be made by Banker's Standing Order provided that the instructions are signed, or otherwise evidenced by two members, and 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.
- 6.5. 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.
- 6.6. If thought appropriate by the Council, payment for certain items may be made by internet banking transfer provided evidence is retained showing which bank signatories approved the payment.

- 6.7. 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.
- 6.8. Regular back-up copies of financial records held on any computer shall be made and shall be stored securely away from the computer in question, and preferably off site.
- 6.9. 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 with a high level of security, are used.
- 6.10. 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.
- 6.11. No passwords or log in details relating to the Council's bank accounts may be stored in saved password facilities on any computer used for Council banking work.
- 6.12. The Council will not maintain any form of cash float. All cash received must be banked intact. Any payments made in cash by the Clerk [or RFO] (for example for postage or minor stationery items) shall be refunded on a regular basis, at least quarterly.

7. PAYMENT 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 and on the appropriate dates stipulated in employment contracts.
- 7.3. No changes shall be made to any employee's pay, emoluments, or terms and conditions of employment without the prior consent of the Council.
- 7.4. Each and every payment to employees of net salary and to the appropriate creditor of the statutory and discretionary deductions shall be recorded in a separate confidential record (confidential cash book). 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. The Council shall consider the need for an Investment 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.
- 8.2. All investments of money under the control of the Council shall be in the name of the Council.
- 8.3. All investment certificates and other documents relating thereto shall be retained in the custody of the RFO.
- 8.4. 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 Chair of the Council at the same time as one is issued to the Clerk or RFO.

9. INCOME

- 9.1. The collection of all sums due to the Council shall be the responsibility of the RFO.
- 9.2. Any sums found to be irrecoverable and any bad debts shall be reported to the Council and shall be written off in the year.
- 9.3. All sums received on behalf of the Council shall be banked intact by the RFO. In all cases, all receipts shall be deposited with the Council's bankers with such frequency as the RFO considers necessary.
- 9.4. The origin of each receipt shall be entered on the paying-in slip.
- 9.5. Personal cheques shall not be cashed out of money held on behalf of the Council.
- 9.6. 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 coinciding with the financial year end.

10. ORDERS FOR WORK, GOODS AND SERVICES

- 10.1. An official order or letter shall be issued for all work, goods and services 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. An officer issuing an official order shall ensure as far as reasonable and practicable that the best available terms are obtained in respect of each transaction, usually by obtaining three or more quotations or estimates from appropriate suppliers, subject to any *de minimis* provisions in Regulation 11 (I) below.
- 10.3. A member may not issue an official order or make any contract on behalf of the Council.
- 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 so that the Minutes can record the power being used.

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 solicitors, accountants, surveyors and planning consultants;
 - (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 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 it is intended to enter into a contract exceeding £10,000 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) the Clerk shall invite tenders from at least three firms to be taken from an appropriate list of contractors approved by the Council for this purpose.
- c. When applications are made to waive financial regulations relating to contracts to enable a price to be negotiated without competition the reason shall be set out in a recommendation to the Council.
- d. Such invitation to tender shall state the general nature of the intended contract and the Clerk shall obtain any 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. Each tendering firm shall be supplied with a specifically marked envelope in which the tender is to be sealed and remain sealed until the prescribed date for opening tenders for that contract.
- e. All sealed 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.
- f. If less than three tenders are received for contracts above £10,000 or if all the tenders are identical, the Council may make such arrangements as it thinks fit for procuring the goods or materials or executing the works.
- g. Any invitation to tender issued under this regulation shall be subject to Standing Order 18 and shall refer to the terms of the Bribery Act 2010.
- h. When it is to enter into a contract of less than £10,000 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) the RFO shall obtain 3 quotations (priced descriptions of the proposed supply); where the value is below £3,000 and above £100 the RFO shall strive to obtain 3 estimates. Otherwise, Regulation 10 (2) 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.

- k. The European Union Procurement Directive shall apply and the terms of the Public Contracts Regulations 2006 and the Utilities Contracts Regulations 2006 including thresholds shall be followed.

12. ASSETS, PROPERTIES AND ESTATES

- 12.1. The Clerk shall make appropriate arrangements for the custody of any title deeds and Land Registry Certificates of properties held by the Council.
- 12.2. No property shall be 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 £50.
- 12.3. 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.

13. INSURANCE

- 13.1. Following the annual risk assessment (per Financial Regulation 14), 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 the property and risks covered thereby and annually review it.
- 13.3. 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.
- 13.4. All appropriate members and employees 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.

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 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.
- 14.2. When considering any new activity, the Clerk shall prepare a draft risk assessment including risk management proposals, for consideration and adoption by the Council.

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.