

COWES TOWN COUNCIL FINANCIAL REGULATIONS

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These Financial Regulations were adopted by the Town Council at its meeting held on

5 September 2024 (Minute No 8986c3)

1. General

- 1.1. These Financial Regulations govern the financial management of the Council and may only be amended or varied by resolution of the Council. They are one of the Council's governing documents and shall be observed in conjunction with the Council's Standing Orders.
- 1.2. Councillors are expected to follow these regulations and not to entice employees to breach them. Failure to follow these regulations brings the office of Councillor into disrepute.
- 1.3. Wilful breach of these regulations by an employee may result in disciplinary proceedings.
- 1.4. In these Financial Regulations:
 - 'Accounts and Audit Regulations' means the regulations issued under Sections 32, 43(2) and 46 of the Local Audit and Accountability Act 2014, or any superseding legislation, and then in force, unless otherwise specified.
 - "Approve" refers to an online action, allowing an electronic transaction to take place.
 - "Authorise" refers to a decision by the Council, or a Committee or an Officer, to allow something to happen.
 - 'Proper practices' means those set out in *The Practitioners' Guide*.
 - *Practitioners' Guide* refers to the guide issued by the Joint Panel on Accountability and Governance (JPAG) and published by NALC in England.
 - 'Must' and **bold text** refer to a statutory obligation the Council cannot change.
 - 'Shall' refers to a non-statutory instruction by the Council to its members and staff.
- 1.5. The Responsible Financial Officer (RFO) holds a statutory office, appointed by the Council. The Clerk has been appointed as RFO and these regulations apply accordingly. 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 control systems;
 - ensures the accounting control systems are observed;
 - ensures the accounting records are kept up to date;
 - seeks economy, efficiency and effectiveness in the use of Council resources;
 - produces financial management information as required by the Council.
- 1.6. **The Council must not delegate any decision regarding:**
 - **setting the final budget or the precept;**
 - **the outcome of a review of the effectiveness of its internal controls;**
 - **approving accounting statements;**
 - **approving an annual governance statement;**
 - **borrowing;**
 - **declaring eligibility for the General Power of Competence;**
 - **addressing recommendations from the internal or external auditors.**
- 1.7. In addition, the Council shall:
 - determine and regularly review the bank mandate for all Council bank accounts.

2. Risk management and internal control

- 2.1. **The Council must ensure that it has a sound system of internal control, which delivers effective financial, operational and risk management.**
- 2.2. The Clerk / RFO shall prepare, for approval by the Council, a risk management policy covering all activities of the Council. This policy and consequential risk management arrangements shall be reviewed by the Council at least annually.
- 2.3. When considering any new activity, the Clerk / RFO shall prepare a draft risk assessment including risk management proposals for consideration by the Council.
- 2.4. **At least once a year, the Council must review the effectiveness of its system of internal control, before approving the Annual Governance Statement.**
- 2.5. **The accounting control systems determined by the RFO must include measures to:**
 - ensure that risk is appropriately managed;
 - ensure the prompt, accurate recording of financial transactions;
 - prevent and detect inaccuracy or fraud;
 - allow the reconstitution of any lost records;
 - identify the duties of Officers dealing with transactions;
 - ensure division of responsibilities.
- 2.6. Once in each quarter two Councillors not on the Finance, Acquisitions & Staffing Committee and not a cheque signatory, shall verify all financial transactions within the quarter. The Councillors shall produce a quarterly report for consideration at the next appropriate Town Council meeting.
- 2.7. Regular back-up copies shall be made of the records on any Council computer and stored either online or in a separate location from the computer. The Council shall put measures in place to ensure that the ability to access any Council computer is not lost if an employee leaves or is incapacitated for any reason.

3. Accounts and audit

- 3.1. All accounting procedures and financial records of the Council shall be determined by the Clerk / RFO in accordance with the Accounts and Audit Regulations.
- 3.2. **The accounting records determined by the Clerk / RFO must be sufficient to explain the Council's transactions and to disclose its financial position with reasonable accuracy at any time. In particular, they must contain:**
 - day-to-day entries of all sums of money received and expended by the Council and the matters to which they relate;
 - a record of the assets and liabilities of the council;
- 3.3. The accounting records shall be designed to facilitate the efficient preparation of the accounting statements in the Annual Governance and Accountability Return (AGAR).
- 3.4. The Clerk / RFO shall complete and certify the annual Accounting Statements of the Council contained in the Annual Governance and Accountability Return in accordance with proper practices, as soon as practicable after the end of the financial year. Having certified the Accounting Statements, the Clerk / RFO shall submit them (with any related documents) to the Council, within the timescales required by the Accounts and Audit Regulations.
- 3.5. **The council must ensure that there is an adequate and effective system of internal audit of its accounting records and internal control system in accordance with proper practices.**

- 3.6. **Any Officer or Member of the Council must make available such documents and records as the internal or external auditor consider necessary for the purpose of the audit.**
- 3.7. The internal auditor shall be appointed by the Council and shall carry out their work to evaluate the effectiveness of the Council's risk management, control and governance processes in accordance with proper practices specified in the Practitioners' Guide.
- 3.8. The council shall ensure that the internal auditor:
- is competent and independent of the financial operations of the Council;
 - reports to the Council in writing, or in person, on a regular basis with a minimum of one written report during each financial year;
 - can demonstrate competence, objectivity and independence, free from any actual or perceived conflicts of interest, including those arising from family relationships;
 - has no involvement in the management or control of the Council.
- 3.9. Internal or external auditors may not under any circumstances:
- perform any operational duties for the Council;
 - initiate or approve accounting transactions;
 - provide financial, legal or other advice including in relation to any future transactions;
 - direct the activities of any Council employee, except to the extent that such employees have been appropriately assigned to assist the internal auditor.
- 3.10. For the avoidance of doubt, in relation to internal audit the terms 'independent' and 'independence' shall have the same meaning as described in The Practitioners Guide.
- 3.11. The Clerk / 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 documents required by the Local Audit and Accountability Act 2014, or any superseding legislation, and the Accounts and Audit Regulations.
- 3.12. The Clerk / RFO shall, without undue delay, bring to the attention of all Councillors any correspondence or report from internal or external auditors.

4. Budget and precept

- 4.1. **Before setting a precept, the Council must calculate its precept requirement for each financial year by preparing and approving a budget, in accordance with The Local Government Finance Act 1992 or succeeding legislation.**
- 4.2. Budgets for salaries and wages, including employer contributions shall be reviewed by the Council annually in October for the following financial year. The Clerk / RFO will inform the Finance, Acquisitions & Staffing Committee of any salary implications before the draft budget is considered.
- 4.3. No later than November each year, the Clerk / RFO shall prepare a draft budget with detailed estimates of all expenditure for the following financial year.
- 4.4. Unspent budgets for completed projects shall not be carried forward to a subsequent year. Unspent funds for partially completed projects may only be carried forward by placing them in an earmarked reserve with the formal approval of the full Council.
- 4.5. The draft budget including any recommendations for the use or accumulation of reserves, shall be considered by the Finance, Acquisitions & Staffing Committee and a recommendation made to the full Council.

- 4.6. Having considered the proposed budget, the Council shall determine its precept requirement by setting a budget. The Council shall set a precept for this amount no later than the end of January for the ensuing financial year.
- 4.7. **Any Member with Council Tax unpaid for more than two months is prohibited from voting on the budget or precept by Section 106 of the Local Government Finance Act 1992 and must disclose at the start of the meeting that Section 106 applies to them.**
- 4.8. The Clerk / RFO shall **issue the precept to the billing authority no later than the end of February** and supply each Member with a copy of the agreed annual budget.
- 4.9. The agreed budget provides a basis for monitoring progress during the year by comparing actual spending against what was planned.
- 4.10. Any addition to, or withdrawal from, any earmarked reserve shall be agreed by the full Council.

5. Procurement

- 5.1. **Members and officers are responsible for obtaining value for money at all times.** Any officer procuring goods, services or works should ensure, as far as practicable, that the best available terms are obtained, usually by obtaining prices from several suppliers.
- 5.2. The Clerk / RFO should verify the lawful nature of any proposed purchase before it is made and in the case of new or infrequent purchases, should ensure that the legal power being used is reported to the meeting at which the order is authorised and also recorded in the minutes.
- 5.3. Every contract shall comply with the Council's Standing Orders and these Financial Regulations and no exceptions shall be made, except in an emergency.
- 5.4. **For a contract for the supply of goods, services or works where the estimated value will exceed the thresholds set by Parliament, the full requirements of The Public Contracts Regulations 2015 or any superseding legislation ("the Legislation"), must be followed in respect of the tendering, award and notification of that contract.**
- 5.5. Where the estimated value is below the Government threshold, the Council shall obtain prices as follows:
- 5.6. For contracts estimated to exceed £50,000 in value, the Clerk shall give at least three weeks' public notice of such intention in the same manner as public notice of meetings of the Council is given and an advertisement placed in either the local or national press and / or trade journals to target the appropriate market. The advertisement should specify the period allocated for the return of tenders. Tenders shall be invited in accordance with Appendix 1.
- 5.7. **For contracts estimated to be over £30,000 including VAT, the Council must comply with any requirements of the Legislation¹ regarding the advertising of contract opportunities and the publication of notices about the award of contracts.**
- 5.8. For contracts greater than £1,500 but below £30,000 including VAT the Clerk / RFO shall seek three written quotations;
- 5.9. The Clerk / RFO, following consultation with the Town Mayor or appropriate Committee Chairman, is authorised to purchase goods or undertake emergency small works to a value of £1,500.
- 5.10. **Contracts must not be split into smaller lots to avoid compliance with these rules.**

¹ The Regulations require councils to use the Contracts Finder website if they advertise contract opportunities and also to publicise the award of contracts over £30,000 including VAT, regardless of whether they were advertised.

- 5.11. The requirement to obtain competitive prices in these regulations need not apply to contracts that relate to items (i) to (iv) below:
- i. specialist services, such as legal professionals acting in disputes;
 - ii. repairs to, or parts for, existing machinery or equipment;
 - iii. works, goods or services that constitute an extension of an existing contract;
 - iv. goods or services that are only available from one supplier or are sold at a fixed price.
- 5.12. When applications are made to waive this financial regulation to enable a price to be negotiated without competition, the reason should be set out in a recommendation to the Council. Avoidance of competition is not a valid reason.
- 5.13. The Council shall not be obliged to accept the lowest or any tender, quote or estimate.
- 5.14. No individual member, or informal group of members may issue an official order or make any contract on behalf of the Council.
- 5.15. No expenditure may be authorised that will exceed the budget for that type of expenditure other than by resolution of the Council.
- 5.16. No expenditure shall be authorised, no contract entered into or tender accepted in relation to any major project, unless the Council is satisfied that the necessary funds are available and that where a loan is required, Government borrowing approval has been obtained first.
- 5.17. An official order, letter or email, 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, along with evidence of receipt of goods.
- 5.18. Any ordering system can be misused and access to them shall be controlled by the Clerk / RFO.

6. Banking and payments

- 6.1. The Council's banking arrangements, including the bank mandate, shall be made by the Clerk / RFO and authorised by the Council; banking arrangements shall not be delegated to a committee. The Council has resolved to bank with Lloyds Bank and Nationwide Building Society.
- 6.2. The Council must have safe and efficient arrangements for making payments, to safeguard against the possibility of fraud or error. Cheques for the bank accounts will be signed by the Clerk / RFO, or Deputy Town Clerk, together with any other two authorised signatories, even after the repeal of section 150 (5) of the Local Government Act 1972.
- 6.3. All invoices for payment should be examined for arithmetical accuracy, analysed to the appropriate expenditure heading and verified to confirm that the work, goods or services were received, checked and represent expenditure previously authorised by the Council before being certified by the Clerk / RFO].
- 6.4. Personal payments (including salaries, wages, expenses and any payment made in relation to the termination of employment) may be summarised to avoid disclosing any personal information.
- 6.5. All payments shall be made by online banking or cheque, in accordance with a resolution of the Council.
- 6.6. A list of payments shall be reported to the next appropriate meeting of the full Council for noting.

7. Electronic payments

- 7.1. Where internet banking arrangements are made with any bank, the Clerk / RFO shall be appointed as the Service Administrator. The bank mandate agreed by the Council shall identify a number of Councillors who will be authorised to approve transactions on those accounts and a minimum of two Councillors and one Clerk will be involved in any online approval process.
- 7.2. All authorised signatories shall have access to view the Council's bank accounts online.
- 7.3. No employee or Councillor shall disclose any PIN or password, relevant to the Council or its banking, to anyone not authorised in writing by the Council.
- 7.4. The Service Administrator shall set up all items due for payment online. A list of payments for approval, together with copies of the relevant invoices, shall be sent by email to two authorised signatories.
- 7.5. In the prolonged absence of the Service Administrator an authorised signatory shall set up any payments due before the return of the Service Administrator.
- 7.6. Two Councillors who are authorised signatories shall check the payment details against the invoices before approving each payment using the online banking system.
- 7.7. Evidence shall be retained showing which members approved the payment online and a printout of the transaction confirming that the payment has been made shall be appended to the invoice for audit purposes.
- 7.8. Payment may be made by BACS by resolution of the Council provided that each payment is approved online by three authorised bank signatories, evidence is retained and any payments are reported to the Council at the next meeting.
- 7.9. Account details for suppliers may only be changed upon written notification by the supplier verified by the Clerk / RFO. This is a potential area for fraud and the individuals involved should ensure that any change is genuine.
- 7.10. Members and officers shall ensure that any computer used for the Council's financial business has adequate security, with anti-virus, anti-spyware and firewall software installed and regularly updated.
- 7.11. Remembered password facilities should not be used on any computer used for Council banking.

8. Cheque payments

- 8.1. Cheques payments are made in accordance with a resolution and shall be signed by two Councillors and countersigned by one Clerk.
- 8.2. A signatory having a family or business relationship with the beneficiary of a payment shall not, under normal circumstances, be a signatory to that payment.
- 8.3. To indicate agreement of the details on the cheque with the counterfoil and the invoice or similar documentation, the signatories shall also initial the cheque counterfoil and invoice.

9. Petty Cash

- 9.1. All cash received must be banked intact. Any payments made in cash by the Clerk / RFO for example for postage or minor stationery items shall be refunded on a regular basis. The Clerk / RFO shall maintain a petty cash float of £300 and may provide petty cash to officers for the purpose of defraying operational and other expenses.
- a) Vouchers for payments made from petty cash shall be kept, along with receipts to substantiate every payment.
 - b) Cash income received must not be paid into the petty cash float but must be separately banked, as provided elsewhere in these regulations.
 - c) Payments to maintain the petty cash float shall be shown separately on any schedule of payments presented for approval.

10. Payment of salaries and allowances

- 10.1. **As an employer, the Council must make arrangements to comply with the statutory requirements of PAYE legislation.**
- 10.2. **Councillors allowances (where paid) are also liable to deduction of tax under PAYE rules and must be taxed correctly before payment.**
- 10.3. Salary rates shall be agreed by the Council. No changes shall be made to any employee's gross pay, emoluments, or terms and conditions of employment without the prior consent of the Council.
- 10.4. Payment of salaries shall be made, after deduction of tax, national insurance, pension contributions and any similar statutory or discretionary deductions, on the dates stipulated in employment contracts.
- 10.5. Deductions from salary shall be paid to the relevant bodies within the required timescales, provided that each payment is reported, as set out in these regulations above.
- 10.6. Each payment to employees of net salary and to the appropriate creditor of the statutory and discretionary deductions shall be recorded in a payroll control account or other separate confidential record, with the total of such payments each calendar month reported in the cashbook.
- 10.7. Any termination payments shall be supported by a report to the Council, setting out a clear business case. Termination payments shall only be authorised by the full Council.
- 10.8. Before employing interim staff, the Council must consider a full business case.

11. Loans and investments

- 11.1. Any application for Government approval to borrow money and subsequent arrangements for a loan must be authorised by the full Council and recorded in the minutes. All borrowing shall be in the name of the Council, after obtaining any necessary approval.
- 11.2. Any financial arrangement which does not require formal borrowing approval from the Secretary of State such as Hire Purchase, Leasing of tangible assets or loans to be repaid within the financial year, must be authorised by the full Council, following a written report on the value for money of the proposed transaction.
- 11.3. The Council shall consider the requirement for an Investment Strategy and Policy in accordance with Statutory Guidance on Local Government Investments, which must be written in accordance with relevant regulations, proper practices and guidance. Any Strategy and Policy shall be reviewed by the Council at least annually.
- 11.4. All investment of money under the control of the Council shall be in the name of the Council.
- 11.5. All investment certificates and other documents relating thereto shall be retained in the custody of the Clerk / RFO.
- 11.6. Payments in respect of short term or long-term investments, including transfers between bank accounts held in the same bank, shall be made in accordance with these regulations.

12. Income

- 12.1. The collection of all sums due to the Council shall be the responsibility of and under the supervision of the Clerk / RFO.
- 12.2. The Council will review all fees and charges for work done, services provided, or goods sold at least annually as part of the budget-setting process, following a report of the Clerk / RFO who shall be responsible for the collection of all amounts due to the Council.
- 12.3. Any sums found to be irrecoverable and any bad debts shall be reported to the Council by the Clerk / RFO and shall be written off in the year. The Council's approval shall be shown in the accounting records.
- 12.4. All sums received on behalf of the Council shall be deposited intact with the Council's bankers, with such frequency as the Clerk / RFO considers necessary. The origin of each receipt shall clearly be recorded on the paying-in slip or other record.
- 12.5. Personal cheques shall not be cashed out of money held on behalf of the Council.
- 12.6. The Clerk / RFO shall ensure that VAT is correctly recorded in the Council's accounts and that any VAT Return required is submitted annually at the end of each financial year.

13. Payments under contracts for building or other construction works

- 13.1. Where contracts provide for payment by instalments, the RFO shall maintain a record of all such payments, which shall be made within the time specified in the contract based on signed certificates from the architect or other consultant engaged to supervise the works.
- 13.2. Any variation of, addition to or omission from a contract must be authorised by the Clerk / RFO to the contractor in writing, with the Council being informed where the final cost is likely to exceed the contract sum by 5% or more, or likely to exceed the budget available.

14. Stores and equipment

- 14.1. The Town Clerk / RFO shall be responsible for the care and custody of stores and equipment.
- 14.2. Delivery notes shall be obtained in respect of all goods received or otherwise delivered and goods must be checked as to order and quality at the time delivery is made.

15. Assets, properties and estates

- 15.1. The Clerk / RFO shall make arrangements for the safe custody of all title deeds and Land Registry Certificates of properties held by the Council.
- 15.2. The Clerk / RFO shall ensure that an appropriate and accurate Register of Assets and Investments is kept up to date, with a record of all properties held by the Council, their location, extent, plan, reference, purchase details, nature of the interest, tenancies granted, rents payable and purpose for which held, in accordance with Accounts and Audit Regulations.
- 15.3. 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.
- 15.4. No interest in land 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. In each case a written report 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, where required by law).
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. In each case a written report shall be provided to Council with a full business case.

16. Insurance

- 16.1. The Clerk / RFO shall keep a record of all insurances effected by the Council and the property and risks covered, reviewing these annually before the renewal date in conjunction with the Council's review of risk management.
- 16.2. The Clerk / RFO shall give prompt notification to Councillors of all new risks, properties or vehicles which require to be insured and of any alterations affecting existing insurances.
- 16.3. The Clerk / RFO shall be notified of any loss, liability, damage or event likely to lead to a claim, and shall report these to the Council at the next available meeting. The Clerk / RFO shall negotiate all claims on the Council's insurers.
- 16.4. 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.

17. Grants

- 17.1. All applications for grants or other financial assistance shall be communicated in writing to the Town Clerk and should include a completed application form and all other documents as detailed in the guidelines / criteria. These are available from the Town Council Office or the Town Council website.
- 17.2. Notwithstanding the provisions of section 17.1, where the organisation has been newly formed within the previous fifteen months, or the application is in regard to a one-off event, Cowes Town Council shall be at liberty to accept budget costs and expenditures in lieu of audited annual accounts.
- 17.3. Representations shall be made exclusively through the Town Clerk and Councillors shall so inform anyone seeking to influence them.
- 17.4. Councillors who are responsible officers of the requesting organisation must be aware that they have a pecuniary interest in the application and may not take part in the Council's deliberations nor lobby other Councillors on behalf of that organisation, except that in Town Council meetings where members of the public are given the opportunity to speak on an application, they may apply to speak on the same basis, but must leave the room prior to any substantive discussion.
- 17.5. Councillors who are Cowes Town Council appointees to the requesting organisation must be aware that they have a non-pecuniary interest in the application.

18. Suspension and revision of Financial Regulations

- 18.1. The Council shall review these Financial Regulations annually and following any change of Clerk / RFO. The Clerk / RFO shall monitor changes in legislation or proper practices and advise the Council of any need to amend these Financial Regulations.
- 18.2. The Council may, by resolution 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 presented to all members. Suspension does not dis-apply any legislation or permit the Council to act unlawfully.
- 18.3. The Council may temporarily amend these Financial Regulations by a duly notified resolution, to cope with periods of absence, local government reorganisation, national restrictions or other exceptional circumstances.

Appendix 1 - Tender process

- 1) Any invitation to tender shall state the general nature of the intended contract and the Clerk / RFO shall obtain the necessary technical assistance to prepare a specification in appropriate cases.
- 2) The invitation shall in addition state that tenders must be addressed to the Clerk in the ordinary course of post, unless an electronic tendering process has been agreed by the Council.
- 3) Where a postal process is used, 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. All sealed tenders shall be opened at the same time on the prescribed date by the Clerk / RFO in the presence of at least one member of Council.
- 4) Where an electronic tendering process is used, the Council shall use a specific email address that will be monitored to ensure that nobody accesses any tender before the expiry of the deadline for submission.
- 5) Any invitation to tender issued under this regulation shall be subject to Standing Order 24.1 and shall refer to the terms of the Bribery Act 2010.

Where the Council does not accept any tender, quote or estimate, the work is not allocated and the Council requires further pricing, no person shall be permitted to submit a later tender, estimate or quote who was present when the original decision-making process was undertaken.