

RISK MANAGEMENT POLICY

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Introduction

This Risk Management Policy forms part of Neston Town Council's internal control and corporate governance arrangements. The policy outlines the Town Council's underlying approach to risk management, documents, the roles and responsibilities of Councillors, the Chief Officer and Staff. It also outlines the key aspects of the risk management process and identifies the main reporting procedures.

Risk management is a key part of the councillors' stewardship role and there is an expectation that elected members will lead and monitor the approach adopted, which will include:

- Approval of the Risk Management Policy;
- Discussion of risk treatment options at Committee level;
- Town Council meeting approval of risk target levels through annual risk assessments.

Risk Management as part of Internal Control

The system of internal control incorporates risk management. This system encompasses a number of elements that together facilitate an effective and efficient operation, enabling the Town Council to respond to operational, financial and commercial risks. These elements include:-

- Policies and procedures;
- Regular reporting;
- Planning and budgeting;
- A fully operating Finance & Administration Committee;
- An Internal Auditor responsible for aspects of the annual review of effectiveness of internal control systems.

Risk Types

Strategic Risk – long-term adverse impacts from poor decision-making or poor implementation. Risks causing damage to the reputation of the Council, loss of public confidence, or in a worse case statutory intervention.

Compliance Risk – failure to comply with legislation or laid down procedures or the lack of documentation to prove compliance. Risks exposure to prosecution, judicial review, employment tribunals, inability to enforce contracts etc.

Financial Risk – fraud and corruption, waste, excess demand for services, bad debts. Risk of additional audit investigation, objection to accounts, reduced service delivery, dramatically increased Council tax precept levels/impact on Council reserves.

Operating Risk – failure to deliver services effectively, malfunctioning equipment, hazards to service users, the public or staff, damage to property. Risk of insurance claims, higher insurance premiums, lengthy recovery processes.

The Town Council will be managing many risks when it reviews both its insurance and its systems. The minutes will record such reviews and amendments. Budget setting and insurance reviews are annual activities, but the review of systems may be less frequent. An exercise of reviewing systems should be carried out every four years, unless triggered by internal or external audit reports, or when a risk changes or there is a change in Chief Officer or Responsible Financial Officer. However, not all of these risks are insurable and for some the premiums may not be cost-effective. Even where insurance is available, money may not be an adequate recompense. The emphasis should always be on eliminating or minimising risk. Risk can be connected to opportunities as well as potential threats.

Risk Overview

A “Risk” is any weakness that could endanger the Staff, Visitors, Councillors, Assets, Operation or Reputation of Neston Town Council.

Risk is a value generated from the three factors “Vulnerability”, “Threat” and “Impact”. Each factor is assigned a numeric value that are multiplied together to give the Risk value. The allocation of values is a subjective process and the higher the values the greater the perceived risk to the council. The factors are defined as follows:

- “Vulnerability” is a measure of the exploitability of a weakness.
- “Threat” is an assessment of how likely it is that a specific weakness will be exploited or will occur.
- “Impact” is an assessment of how much it will hurt or cost if the weakness occurs

The Vulnerability and Threat factors are often multiplied together and expressed as a single item “Hazard”. It is the product of “Hazard” and “Impact” that provides a value for “Risk”.

In the Council risk spreadsheet, the "Hazard" and "Risk" columns risks are identified from 1 – 3 with risk value being low (1), medium, (2) and high (3). The Town Council's risk assessment document is reviewed annually by Full Council in March.

Town Council Risk Management Principles

The following key principles outline the Town Council's approach to risk management and internal control:

- The Town Council, as a whole, has responsibility for overseeing its own risk management;
- An open and receptive approach to managing risk is adopted by the Town Council;
- The Chief Officer supports, advises and implements policies approved by the Town Council;
- The Town Council makes takes a conservative and prudent approach to the recognition of weaknesses. The council will declare and monitor all identified weaknesses irrespective how slight or minor they may appear.
- The Town Council will make a full and thorough disclosure of the financial and non-financial implications of all identified risks.

Roles

The Chief Officer and the Responsible Financial Officer in respect to risk management are responsible for the following actions:-

- To implement policies on risk management and internal control;
- To identify and evaluate the significant risks faced by the Town Council for its consideration;
- To provide adequate information in a timely manner to the council on the status of risk and controls;
- To arrange for the Council to undertake an annual review of effectiveness of the system of internal control.

The Internal Auditor will check the minutes and any other documentation they deem relevant for any suggestion of unusual activity and evidence that risks are being identified and managed.

Mitigation

Town Council risk mitigation seeks always to reduce exposure by applying one of the following actions. Each weaknesses is analysed and list is always applied in numerical until a satisfactory mitigation is achieved:

- Implement an action that will remove the risk;
- Implement an action that will reduce the risk to an acceptable level;
- Transfer the risk and responsibility (e.g. To a contractor), the Council will always retain accountability;
- Insure against the risk;
- If none of the above are possible and it is a weakness we cannot avoid, accept the risk.
- In many cases mitigation will be a combination of two or more of these strategies.

For any weakness that it proves impossible to apply any of the first three strategies must be specifically raised on the next Finance & Administration Committee meeting. This will ensure that Full Council will vote on whether such a risk is acceptable.

Annual Review of Effectiveness

On production of the Internal Auditor's report, the Finance Committee will:-

- Review the previous year and examine the Town Council's track effectiveness on risk management and internal control;
- Consider the internal and external risk profile of the coming year, noting any new areas of risk, and consider whether current internal control arrangements are likely to be effective;
- Evaluate the potential consequences to the Town Council if an event that has been identified as a risk takes place and consider measures to avoid, reduce or control same;
- Make recommendations to the Town Council on its findings.

In making any recommendations, the Finance & Administration Committee will consider the following aspects:-

- Timely identification and assessment of significant risks;
- Prioritisation of risks and allocation of resources to address areas of high exposure;
- Quality and timeliness of information on significant risks;
- Time it takes for control breakdowns to be recognised or new risks to be identified;
- Ability of the Town Council to learn from its problems;
- Commitment and speed with which corrective actions are implemented.

Policy to be updated to include guidance relating to Martyn's Law once new anti-terror guidance comes into effect (expected September 2027).