



AGENDA

You are summoned to a Meeting of the

COUNCIL

to be held at 7.30 p.m. on Tuesday 14th January 2025
at Champions Manor Hall

Local residents are welcome to attend this meeting. At the meeting, your elected Councillors will take decisions affecting YOU, the Community and the Town. The public may participate for up to 15 minutes for this purpose. If you have any queries, please telephone the Town Clerk on 01245 321817. Please join us.

Karen Atkins
South Woodham Ferrers Town Clerk
8th January 2025

- 1. To RECEIVE and ACCEPT** any apologies for absence.
- 2. Dispensation considerations**
To consider any dispensations, as required. Standing Order 12. Dispensation requests shall be in writing and submitted to the Town Clerk as soon as possible before the meeting, or failing that, at the start of the meeting for which the dispensation is required.
- 3. Declarations of Interest**
Any Member declaring an interest is asked to state whether this is a pecuniary, registerable or non- registerable interest. Clarification, if required, can be sought prior to the meeting with the Chairman or the Town Clerk.
Members must not participate in any discussion on the matter in which they have declared a Disclosable Pecuniary Interest or other Registerable Interest or participate in any vote, or further vote, taken on the matter at the meeting and must withdraw from the room unless the Member has received a dispensation in relation to the matter.
- 4. Confirmation of Minutes**
To **APPROVE** the minutes of the Council meeting held on 19th November 2024 as a true record.
- 5. Public Questions**
In accordance with Standing Order 3.e to allow up to 15 minutes for members of the public to make representations, answer questions and give evidence in respect of any item on the agenda. At the close of this item members of the public will no longer be permitted to address the Council.

- 6. General Power of Competence**
Council to resolve that it meets the criteria for eligibility for the General Power of Competence for 2025-2026, having both an electoral mandate of two thirds of members of the Council and a qualified Clerk.
- 7. Meeting Schedule 2025/26**
To consider the meeting calendar for 2025-26 as attached to the agenda.
- 8. Reports from Committees are attached to the agenda.**
- 8.1 Planning & Environment Committee**
To note that a meeting was held on 26th of November & 17th of December 2024.
- 8.2 Events, Community & Leisure Committee**
To note that a meeting was held on the 5th of November 2024.
- 8.3 Finance & Projects Committee**
To note that a meeting was held on the 3rd of December 2024.
- 9. Interim Audit**
Council to **NOTE** the Internal Audit report attached to agenda.
- 10. Budgets and Precept 2025 -2026**
The Council to agree the budget and Precept for 2025/26. Attached to agenda is the Budget and Precept agreed for recommendation at Finance & Projects on 12th November 2024.
- 10.1** It is **RECOMMENDED** that the Council approves the attached budget of £465,465 for 2025/26
- 10.2** It is **RECOMMENDED** that a gross precept of £465,465 for 2025/26 is submitted to Chelmsford City Council. Based on a tax base of 6102.57 Band D would be an amount of £76.27. For the 2024 – 2025 financial year the band D amount was £73.45.
- 11. Review of Policies**
In accordance with Standing Order 5.j.xvii to xviii Council to review and agree current policies and the Investment Strategy attached to the agenda. This was recommended By Finance and Projects Committee on 3rd December 2024.
- Annual Investment Strategy
 - General Reserves Policy

 - Council to review and agree the current policies attached to the agenda.
 - IT Policy
 - Internal Control and Internal Audit
 - Review of Financial Risk Assessment
 - Whistle Blowing Policy
 - Hall Hire Grant Policy
- 12. Community Engagement**
- Council to consider introducing monthly/quarterly Councillor Surgeries to enhance community engagement.
 - Town Clerk to update Council on media promotion.
- 13. Uniform Youth Land**
Council to receive an update from the Town Clerk on the land at the Uniform Youth Site.

14. Items to Note

- Community Resilience training has been booked on Tuesday 21st January 2025 18.30 - 20.00pm
- Distinguished Honours Award - Council to **NOTE** advertising and selecting of candidate's nominations for 2025 from 20th January 2025 to close 28th February 2025.
To **NOTE** that this annual award is selected by Council on the 18th of March 2025 and presented at the Annual Town Meeting on 15th April 2025.
- The Champions Manor Hall conversion tender will be posted to the Contract Finder Government Website w/c 13/1/2025.

15. Chelmsford City Council / Essex County Council

To consider report(s) to Council from City Councillors/County Councillor concerning matters of interest to South Woodham Ferrers.

16. Town Mayor's Announcements

A note a list of recent events attended by the Town Mayor is attached to the agenda.

17. Media Release

To consider whether any items on the agenda warrant a media release.

Next Meeting

- 18.** The next Council meeting will be held on 18th March 2025 at 7.30pm.

Any member who is unable to attend the meeting should send their apologies and reason to the Town Clerk prior to the meeting.

Reports to Council 14 January 2025

8.1 Planning & Environment Committee

It was noted that a meeting was held on 26/11/24 & 17/12/24

- Future works agreed on the Garden of Remembrance for the sensory garden area funded by the locality grant from Essex County Council and Councillor Bob Massey.

8.2 Events, Community & Leisure Committee

It was noted that a meeting was held on 05/11/24.

- VE day Events 2025

8.3 Finance & Projects Committee

It was noted that a meeting was held on 03/12/24.

- Annual Investment Strategy & General Reserves Policy
- Emergency lighting work at Champions Manor Hall will be completed on 23rd and 24th January 2025.
- The upgrade for the Intruder System and replace the camera in the MPR room has been installed with Hewes for the 2/3rd of January 2025.
- The VOIP telephone system has been installed in the office at Champions Manor Hall on the 28th of November 2024.

<p>Risk Assessment</p> <p>HIGH 0 MEDIUM 0 LOW 16</p>	<p>South Woodham Ferrers Town Council INTERNAL AUDIT 2024-2025 AUDIT PLAN WITH COMMENTS / FINDINGS</p> <p>I am pleased to report to Members of the South Woodham Ferrers Town Council (the “Council”), that I have completed my interim internal audit of the Council’s records for the six-month period to 30 September 2024, following my audit visit and subsequent conversations on 24 October 2024.</p> <p>Councillors should be aware that my work cannot be relied upon to identify the occasional omission or insignificant error, nor do I actively seek evidence of breaches of trust or statute, neglect or fraud, which may have taken place. It is the responsibility of the Councillors of the Council to guard against such events, but if during my audit testing such events are discovered I am duty bound to disclose such events to the Council.</p> <p>I would like to take this opportunity to thank the Town Clerk, Karen Atkins for her assistance given to me during my audit visit.</p>		
<p>Area</p>	<p>Item</p>	<p>Comments / Findings Interim visit 24 Oct 2024</p>	<p>Comments / Findings Year-end Audit XX XXX 2025</p>
<p>Previous Audits</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Date of last External Audit Certificate or Exemption Certificate for 2023-24 • Comments if any • Publication on website. • Date of last Internal Audit • Comments if any • Review of any items outstanding from previous internal / external audit reports. 	<p>PKF Littlejohn signed off the Report & Certificate 2023-24 on 27 August 2024, there were no comments. F&P 15 Oct 2024 Min FP24-33 noted the outcome of the External Audit and Council 22 Oct 2024 Min C24-65 The AGAR and additional financial information have been published on the Finance webpage in accordance with the regulations.</p> <p>The Internal Audit Report noted by F&P 11 June 2024 Min FP24-8. There were no items to follow up.</p>	
<p>Minutes</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review of the Council minutes in particular the full Council meetings and the Committees responsible for Governance & Finance matters. • General Power of Competence (GPC) ? • Dispensations in place eg - S.40 LA&A Act 2014 filming/recording 	<p>As well as the full Council meeting the following main Committees meet all reporting to full Council. Finance & Projects Comm (F&P) Planning & Environment Comm (monthly) Events, Community & Leisure Comm Agendas and Minutes are available to view on the website. Council 16 Jan 2024 Min C573 – agreed to adopt the General Power of Competence (GPC), to be revisited annually.</p>	

		Council 22 Oct 2024 Min C24-52 Local Council Award Scheme (LCAS). Council awarded the Foundation Award. The Council expressed a desire to achieve the Quality and then the Gold Awards.	
Code of Conduct/ Acceptance of Office	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Date adopted • Any changes in elected/co-opted members since last Audit visit? • DPI's complete • DPI's on website or weblink • New Governance Compliance NEXT ELECTION ? 	<p>20 Councillors in post a full compliment</p> <p>Pauline Price co-opted Council 19 March 2024 Min C592 – DPI signed 5 April 2024</p> <p>DPI's available to view on the Council's website.</p> <p>May 2027</p>	
Standing Orders (SOs) and Financial Regulations (FRs)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Have they been formally adopted and applied? • Have any changes been made since they were adopted or the last audit and minuted? • Are Tender/contract values consistent between SOs & FRs and changes been formally adopted by the Council? • Virtual Meetings / Delegation to Clerk/RFO still in place ? • Updated re New NALC Models SO's 2022, Fin Regs 2024 ? <p>Two signature rule still in place?</p>	<p>New Model Financial Regulations published by NALC following my previous audit visit in May 2024. The New Model Financial Regulations were approved by F&P 11 June 2024 Min FP24-9 and Council 18 June 2024 Min C24-40</p> <p>The Standing Orders were amended to reflect the new Financial Regulations. Both documents are on the Council's website along with 25 other policies.</p> <p>Yes</p>	
Risk Management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Risk Assessments – Are they: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Carried out regularly? ○ Adequate? ○ Reported in the minutes? ○ Inspections of play equipment etc if carried out by staff/Cllrs have they been trained, accredited? ○ ANNUAL REVIEW ? • Insurance cover – is it: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Appropriate/Adequate? 	<p>Council 14 May 2024 Min 24-19 Risk Management Policy review.</p> <p>The above policy compliments the Financial Risk Assessment document and the Strategic Risk Register.</p> <p>The play area at the Village Hall is checked every morning by the fully trained ESO's (accreditation valid until May 2025) completing a risk assessment and playground check list. ROSPA annual inspection undertaken by Play Safety in June 2024.</p> <p>Insurance cover in place with Zurich Municipal from 1 June 24 to 31 May 2025, the last year of the existing</p>	

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ LTA in place? ○ Reviewed regularly? ○ Fidelity Guarantee Cover £ (Balances + ½ Precept) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Internal controls – are they: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Documented? ○ Adequate? ○ Reviewed regularly? ○ Statement of Internal Control (SIC)? ● Systems and Procedures – are they: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Documented? ○ Adequate? ○ Followed? ○ Reviewed regularly? 	<p>Long Term Agreement to 1 June 2025. As mentioned previously the Town Clerk will source three quotes when the renewal quote is due. Specialist brokers available are www.jameshallam.co.uk and www.clearcouncils.co.uk (formerly BHIB based in Leicester) Fidelity Guarantee = £1m F&P Comm 9 April 2024 Min FP230 approved a 24-month lease of an electric van, charging point and insurance cover for staff members. A separate motor policy with Zurich Municipal commenced on 31 May 2024 to 30 May 2025.</p> <p>F&P 11 June 2024 Min FP24-14.2 Cllr Price appointed Cllr for verification purposes such as bank reconciliation. Quarterly verification The “Adequate and effective system of Internal Control and Internal Audit” document - Council 16 Jan 2024 Min C578 – Internal Control and Internal Audit Policy. Next review Jan 2025</p> <p>The Policies webpage includes 27 Policies at the time of my audit visit. Council 14 May 2024 Min 24-19 Complaints Procedure, Publication Scheme, and Risk Management Policy. Council 18 June 2024 Min C24-41 Accessibility Statement, FOI Scheme, Press & Social Media Policy and H&S Policy Council 22 Oct 2024 Min C24-61 Grants Policy, Tree Policy and CIL Policy. The Strategic Risk Register was deferred to the next Meeting to allow further amendments to be incorporated.</p>	
<p>Budgetary Controls</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Is the annual budgeting process reported and approved by the full Council? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Budget/Precept amounts minuted? ○ Review of All Reserves included as part of the Budget Setting Process? ● Is the actual performance against the budgets reported to the Council during the year 	<p>F&P Comm 11 June 2024 Min FP24-6 noted the budgetary positions of the Committee and Champions Manor Hall as at 31 May 2024 as well as the bank balances at the same date. F&P Comm 15 Oct 2024 Min FP24-25 noted the budgetary positions of the Committee and Champions Manor Hall as at 30 Sept 2024 as well as the bank balances at the same date. Review of Reserves by F&P 15 Oct 2024 Min FP24-27</p> <p>Budget/Precept for 2025-26</p>	

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Compare with Fin Regs requirements? ● Are significant variances explained in sufficient detail? 	F&P 12 Nov 2024 will be considering the Draft Budget and forecast for 2025-26. The Council meeting in January 2025 will set the level of Precept Requirement by which time the Council will know the Tax Base for 2025-26.	
<p>Section 137 expenditure if relevant (GPC adopted?)</p> <p>£10.81 FOR 2024-25 (£9.93 FOR 2023-24)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● What is the cash limit for the year? ● Is a separate account/analysis kept? ● Has the cash limit been exceeded? <p>Have the spending powers been properly used and Minuted?</p>	GPC adopted – Council 16 Jan 2024	
Book-keeping	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Cashbook - is it: ● Fit for purpose? ● Arithmetically correct? ● Balanced regularly? ● Reported to Council regularly? ● Turnover above £200k pa ? Income & Expenditure basis of accounting? ● Record keeping and the arrangements in place to store previous year's accounts etc. 	<p>The Council uses the Rialtas Omega Cashbook, Sales & Purchase Ledgers and the Purchase Ordering function.</p> <p>The Council accounts on an Income & Expenditure basis</p>	
Petty Cash	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Has the amount of petty cash float been agreed? ● Are all petty cash entries recorded? ● Are payments made from petty cash fully supported by receipts / VAT invoices? ● Are petty cash reimbursements signed for? ● Date of last petty cash reimbursement/top-up? ● Is petty cash balance independently checked regularly 	N/A	

<p>Payroll</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Who is on the payroll and are contracts of employment in place? • Who is the RFO? • Annual Appraisal in place ? • Have there been any changes to the establishment and/or changes to individual contracts during the year? • Members Allowances in place and paid via payroll system? • Have new appointments and changes to contracts been approved and minuted? • Do salaries paid agree with those approved by the Council? • Have PAYE/NI/Pension requirements been properly applied and accounted for? • Payroll outsourced? <p>WORKPLACE PENSION IN PLACE</p>	<p>The Council currently has 5 employees – Town Clerk – Karen Atkins (37hrs pw) Environment & Leisure Officer – David Smith (37hrs pw) Admin Assistant – Debbie Edwards (20hrs pw) Two ESO’s – Shaun Blackmore (37hrs pw) and John Rogers (32hrs pw) Town Clerk appraisal 3 May 2024 reported to the Staffing Comm 10 May 2024</p> <p>Cllr Allowances paid quarterly and claimed by all 17 Cllrs re-elected in May 2023.</p> <p>National Pay Award 2024-25 award announcement received from NALC on the day of my Audit Visit. The award of 2.5% to be put on the next Agenda.</p> <p>Worknest HR retained with services to be used on an ad-hoc basis in the future.</p> <p>Payroll is outsourced to James Todd & Co who provide the necessary HMRC and Essex Pension Reports as well as the payslips</p> <p>Essex Pension Fund available to eligible employees</p>	
<p>Payments</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Are all payments recorded and supported by appropriate documentation? • Are payments minuted? • Review of DD’s and SO’s ? • STAFF costs definition for inclusion in Box 4 for 2024-25, check parity for 2023-24 ? Currently includes salary, tax, NIC & Pension (employee & ers) + taxable benefits (home working allowance, broadband & phone allowance etc NOT incl.) 	<p>Good system of verification & certification of invoices for payment involving Council Officers and 2 Councillors who also approve the BACs payments. F&P 11 June 2024 Min FP24-14 renewed payment signatories and appointed Cllr Price for the verification process Council 18 June 2024 C24-43. Payment schedules reported to F&P Comm each month and payments listing published as part of the Agenda papers on the website.</p> <p>Several SO’s and DD’s in place mainly linked with utility services received from the likes of O2, BT, Barclaycard, Chelmsford CC, Total energies, British Gas, Wave Utilities (water charges for CMH & Garden of Remembrance) and Smart Office Solutions Ltd – office printing facilities</p> <p>Staff costs definition used within the Omega Accounting package complies with the Statement of Accounts requirement for Box 4.</p>	

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Has VAT been identified, recorded and reclaimed? • Have internal control procedures inc. segregation of duties been adhered to? • Contracts: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ What contracts exist? ○ Compliance with SOs & FRs for letting of contracts? ○ Have any new contracts or contract variations and/or extensions been awarded in the year? ○ Have contract payments been made in accordance with the contract document? 	<p>VAT submissions to date – 2023-24 Qtr 4 £3,473 received 23 April 2024 2024-25 Qtr 1 £7,802 received 10 July 2024 Qtr 2 £9,469 received 8 Oct 2024</p> <p>Sample contracts/agreements in place. SLR Contractors Ltd – decoration of Champions Manor Hall (CMH) CT Services Group – CMR Cleaning JW Davis Enterprises Ltd – Open Space Contract Green Recycling – Trade Waste Sumup Payments Ltd Cinergi Ltd - Solar Panels at CMH Fen Contracts – tree works various locations LITE – Christmas Lights Contract renewed for a further 3 years 2023 – 2025 inc G Burley & Sons Ltd – summer planting and Mtce</p>	
<p>Receipts</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Are all receipts recorded correctly? • Are all receipts promptly banked? • Precept, CTSG and Sect 106 & CIL payments • Are income records inc allotments, burials, hirings adequate? • Are invoicing arrangements adequate including VAT where applicable? 	<p>Sumup machine in place to assist with group events like the toddler group. F&P Comm 9 April 2024 Min FP232 – Garden of Remembrance fees for 2024-25 and Min FP233 – Champions Manor Hall/Bandstand Hire fees for 2024-25 increase of 10% rounded to the nearest £1.</p> <p>CIL Receipts 1/10/23 – 31/3/24 = £5,663 recd 8 May 2024</p> <p>Invoicing for hirings checked</p>	
<p>Bank reconciliation & PWLB Loans</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What current/deposit accounts exist? • Investment Strategy recommended where bank balances are in excess of £100k. FSCS aware ? • Are bank reconciliations regularly carried out for each account and signed off by Councillors? 	<p>Bank account balances as at 30 Sept 2024 - Unity Trust Current (2312) - £263,985 Unity Trust Instant Saver (7758) - £322,361 2.75% Santander Bus Saver (2723) - <u>£297,580</u> 3.23% <u>Total cash balance - £883,926</u></p> <p>Bank interest received during 2023-24 - £9,713 The Instant Saver account was opened 6 Feb 2024. The interest received from this investment totals £4,549 and</p>	

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Year-end Level of Balances to Precept ratio Are the cheque counterfoils, paying-in books and bank statements adequately referenced? When was the last review of the banking arrangements? Internet Banking? Debit/Credit Card? and if in place Financial Regs up to date ? Signature review (Two signatures required?) Any PWLB loans in place ? 	<p>from the Santander investment £5,590, totalling £10,139 to 2 Oct 2024, already more than the total for 2023-24.</p> <p>The Council currently has significant investments, which have been fully approved by Council. I strongly recommend that the Council adopts a formal Investment Strategy to sit alongside its exiting General Reserves Policy.</p> <p>Unity Trust internet banking in place Barclaycard in place with a spend limit of £5,000 per 6 week period</p> <p>Bank signatories increased from 4 to 6 Cllrs to provide more resilience. F&P Comm 11 June 2024 FP24-14.1</p> <p>PWLB loan outstanding at 31 March 2024 = £72k</p>	
<p>Assets changes Asset Register (AR) and Investment Register if applicable.</p> <p>Loans by the Council</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Are all the material assets owned by the Council recorded in an AR ? Is the AR up to date? Basis of Asset Values and Reviews Are long-term investments recorded? Does the AR show the insurance values ? Digital Photographic evidence? Is there a separate Inventory List of low value items (e.g. below the insurance excess levels) ? Loans to local bodies including any indemnities in place. 	<p>Asset value as at 31 Mar 2024 - £3,081,532 Asset Register reviewed by Annual Council May 2024 C24-10.</p> <p>F&P Comm 11 June 2024 Min FP24-7 noted delivery of the leased electric van on 31 May 2024, insurance cover with Zurich Municipal in place. New lease partner agreed FP24-12. – van is a Renault Kangoo YF24HHC</p> <p>Solar Panels tender for CMR considered by F&P 11 June 2024 MinFP-11 recommending Tender 2 with batteries to Council 18 June 2024 – 24-39 Installation scheduled for November 2024. Post Audit Note: Installation completed 14 Nov 2024, final sign-off to be arranged.</p> <p>Champion Manor Hall - 2 benches F&P 11 June 2024 FP24-13</p>	

<p>Year-end procedures Inc. AGAR</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Does the 2024-25 AGAR Statement of Accounts agree with the cashbook? • Is there an audit trail from the financial records to the accounts and have debtors and creditors been properly recorded? • Date of approval of 2023-24 AGAR & Certificate of Exemption criteria met, exemption declared • PROOF of public rights provision during summer 2024 & website– AIAR ICOs • Public Inspection Period Minuted ? • Governance compliance regime - refer to Practitioners’ Guide 2024 	<p>Year-end procedures to be checked at final audit</p> <p>The AGAR 2023-24 was approved by Council 18 June 2024 Mins C24-42.1 & 42.2, the RFO had signed off the Statement of Accounts on 8 May 2024 before the Meeting started.</p> <p>Date of Announcement - 20 June 2024 Public Inspection period – 24 June to 2 Aug 2024 Evidence – Evidence of the website posting of the Notice of Public Rights dated 20 June 2024 as per the “news” webpage within the Councils website.</p> <p>F&P 11 June 2024 Min FP24-15 and Council 18 June 2024 Min C24-42.3 noted period of exercise of public rights</p>	
<p>Additional tests – (as necessary)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Computer systems: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ The procedures for the backing up of computerised records ○ Council owned PC/laptop ? ○ Email security ○ Encryption of data? • Trust Funds/Charities – Charity Commission filing? • Annual review of the effectiveness of Internal Audit inc. Appointment of IIA • Website host and Webmaster and any changes? 	<p>No changes since my last visit - VOIP installation upgrade at Champions Manor Hall – provided by Daisy Communications Ltd Office computer upgrades for 3 staff and a new Town Council owned laptop Ahead 4 manages the Council’s IT requirements including hosting the emails, Office 365 licences and security arrangements.</p> <p>No charity involvement</p> <p>Annual review and appointment to be considered by F&P Committee</p>	

	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Website functionality & accessibility NALC L09-18• TRANSPARENCY CODE compliant especially for Exempt Authorities• Post GDPR (May 2018)<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ Privacy Notice○ Cllr email addresses?○ Email disclaimer <p>Other matters inc DPO arrangements</p>	<p>Vision ICT</p> <p>The Town Clerk is the main “webmaster” but the Admin Assistant and Environment & Leisure Officer also contribute to the management of the Councils website.</p> <p>Cllrs email addresses were introduced from April 2023 similar the staff addresses eg debbie@southwoodhamferrerstc.gov.uk</p> <p>The Town Clerk is the DPO</p>	
--	--	--	--

SOUTH WOODHAM FERRERS TOWN COUNCIL

ANNUAL INVESTMENT STRATEGY 2025-26

Introduction:

South Woodham Ferrers Town Council acknowledges the importance of prudently investing all funds held on behalf of the community by the Council.

The Town Council Investment Strategy complies (as appropriate) with the revised requirements set out in the Statutory Guidance on Local Government Investments (3rd Edition) issued by the Department of Communities and Local Government effective from 1 April 2018.

Investments under £10,000 are not subject to the Guidance but for investments between £10,000 and £500,000 the Council is required to make a formal decision on the extent to which it would be reasonable to adopt the Guidance either in part or in full. When making investments over £100,000, the Council is required to adopt the Guidance in full and to put an investment strategy into place.

Strategy:

The South Woodham Ferrers Town Council has adopted the Secretary of State's Guidance in full.

In accordance with Section 15(1) of the Local Government Act 2003, the Council will, therefore, have regard (a) to such Guidance as the Secretary of State may issue and (b) to such other Guidance as the Secretary of State may by regulations specify.

The Council's investment priorities are the security of reserves and liquidity of its investments.

The Council will aim to achieve the optimum return on its investments commensurate with proper levels of security and liquidity.

All investments will be made in sterling.

The Department for Communities and Local Government maintains that borrowing of monies purely to invest or to lend and make a return is unlawful and this Council will not engage in this activity.

The Council will monitor the risk of loss on investments by periodically reviewing credit ratings and will only invest in institutions with a high credit quality. Any reduction in credit rating will be reported to the Council and, if necessary, the Proper Officer will take appropriate action within delegated powers to protect Council assets.

If an external investment manager is used, he / she will be contractually required to comply with the Strategy.

The Council's Responsible Financial Officer will attend the EALC annual finance conference in order to remain up to date with financial regulations and requirements.

Specified Investments:

Specified Investments are those offering high security and high liquidity, made in sterling and with a maturity of no more than 12 months. Such short-term investments made with a body or investment scheme of high quality (including the UK Government or a local authority) will automatically be Specified Investments. The Council will only invest in institutions with a minimum 'A' rating from approved credit rating organisations and will aim to spread its capital assets amongst a range of appropriate institutions.

For the prudent management of its funds, maintaining sufficient levels of security and liquidity, the Council will use:

- Deposits with banks, building societies, UK Government or local authorities.

Non-Specified Investments:

These investments have greater potential risk – examples include investment in the money market, stocks and shares – and professional investment advice may be required.

Given the unpredictability and uncertainties surrounding such investments, the Council will not use this type of investment.

Liquidity Investments:

The Responsible Financial Officer / Proper Officer will determine the maximum periods for which funds may prudently be committed so as not to compromise liquidity.

Investments will be regarded as commencing on the date on which the commitment to invest is entered into rather than the date on which funds are paid over to the counterparty.

The Council does not currently hold any liquidity investments and no liquidity investments are currently envisaged.

Long Term Investments:

All investments by local councils, other than in interest bearing bank and building society accounts, must be identified as long-term investment and treated as capital expenditure. Investments in longer term funds (in excess of 12 months) are by definition long term investments and, thus, deemed to be capital expenditure. Any investment in longer term funds should not exceed the surplus of cash balances above the Council's annual budgeted expenditure reduced by the annual precept.

The Council does not currently hold any long-term investments and no long-term investments are currently envisaged.

Investment Report:

Investment forecasts for the forthcoming financial year are accounted for when the annual budget is prepared. Investments will be reviewed annually following a report from the Responsible Financial Officer to the Finance & Projects Committee.

Review and Amendment of Regulations:

The Council's Investment Strategy will be reviewed annually and at other times as necessary. The Annual Strategy for the financial year will be prepared by the Responsible Financial Officer and presented to the Full Council.

Publication:

The Investment Strategy will be published and available in hard copy and on the Council's website.

2025-26 Investment Plan

Funds not required for immediate use will be invested in the Unity Trust Account, Unity Instant Access Account and Santander Business Savings Account.

Santander Interest rate is 3.23% annual gross (variable) paid monthly. Unity Instant Access Account is 2.75% Annual Equivalent Rate paid quarterly.

Both accounts are competitive with other providers and this spread assists in achieving a greater level of security in accordance with the Financial Services Compensation Scheme.

Existing surplus monies will remain invested in the Council's existing Unity Trust Bank Instant Access Account, as recommended by the Clerk/RFO and Finance & Projects Committee and ratified by Full Council, in order to yield a higher interest rate until such time as funds are required.

The Council and Clerk /RFO will review the situation on a regular basis as set out above and act as appropriate to deal with any changes in circumstances.

The Council may consider the use of monies in general reserves during the year, if required, for the delivery of the proposed extension/clubhouse building, subject to first having considered all available options for financing this project.

Given the limited availability / accessibility of High Street banking facilities and the current low level of interest rates, it is not anticipated that the use of private sector financial management advisers would benefit the Council.

The Officer responsible for dealing with Financial Management will attend conferences / training as offered by EALC and other appropriate bodies.

General Reserves Policy

1. Introduction

South Woodham Ferrers Town Council is required to maintain adequate financial reserves to meet the needs to the organisation. The purpose of this policy is to set out how the Town Council will determine and review the level of reserves.

Sections 32 and 43 of the Local Government Finance Act 1992 require local authorities to have regard to the level of reserves needed for meeting estimated future expenditure when calculating the budget requirement. However, there is no specified minimum level of reserves than an authority should hold and it is the responsibility of the Town Clerk, based on appropriate guidance from internal and external auditors, to advise the Town Council on the level of reserves and to ensure that there are procedures for establishment and use.

2. Types of Reserves

Reserves can be categorised as General or Earmarked.

General Reserves are funds which do not have any restrictions as to their use. These reserves can be used to smooth the impact of uneven cash flows, offset the budget requirement if necessary or can be held as provision for unexpected events or emergencies, including unplanned expenditure.

Earmarked Reserves can be held for several reasons, including but not limited to:

- Renewals – to enable the Town Council to plan and finance an effective programme of infrastructure replacement and planned property maintenance. These reserves are a mechanism to smooth expenditure so that a sensible replacement programme can be achieved without the need to vary budgets
- Carry forward of underspend – the Town Council may commit expenditure to projects but cannot spend the budget in year. Reserves are used as a mechanism to carry forward these resources
- Insurance reserve – to enable the Town Council to meet the excess to claims
- Other earmarked reserves may be set up from time to time to meet known or predicted liabilities

3. Use of Reserves

Reserves should not be held to fund on-going expenditure. This would be unsustainable as, at some point, the reserves would be exhausted. To the extent that reserves are used to meet short term funding gaps, they may be replenished in the following year. However, Earmarked Reserves that have been used to meet a specific liability would not need to be replenished, having served their original purpose.

Any decision to set up a Reserve must be made by the Town Council.

Expenditure from Reserves and the virement of monies can only be authorised by the Town Council.

Reviewing the Town Council's Financial Risk Assessment and Reserves is part of the budgeting and year end accounting procedures and identifies planned and unplanned expenditure items, thereby indicating an appropriate level of Reserves.

4. General Reserves

The level of Reserves is a matter of judgement and so thus policy does not attempt to prescribe a blanket level. The primary means of building general reserves will be through an allocation from the annual budget. This will be in addition to any amounts needed to replenish reserves that have been consumed in the previous year.

Setting the level of General Reserves is one of several related decisions in the formulation of the medium-term financial strategy and the annual budget. The Town Council must build and maintain sufficient working balances to cover the key risks it faces, as expressed in its financial risk assessment.

If in extreme circumstances General Reserves were exhausted due to major unforeseen spending pressures within a particular financial year, the Town Council would be able to draw down from its Earmarked Reserves to provide short term resources.

Even at times when extreme pressure is put on the finances the Town Council must keep a minimum balance sufficient to cover three month's payroll costs to staff in General Reserves at all times.

Earmarked Reserves

These will be established on a 'needs' basis, in line with anticipated requirements.

Current level of financial reserves

The level of financial reserves held by the Town Council will be agreed during the discussion held regarding the setting of the budget for the next financial year.

The advised level of General Reserves is 3 to 12 months of nett revenue spending.

- Precept – Capital Spending = Nett Revenue Spending

Responsible Officer	Town Clerk	Date effective from	November 2024	Review date	November 2025
----------------------------	------------	----------------------------	---------------	--------------------	---------------

INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY (IT) POLICY

Purpose

The purpose of this policy is to detail the Town Council's usage guidelines for the information technology systems including email, document access and storage, instant messaging and video conferencing systems. This policy will help the Town Council reduce risk of an IT related security incident, foster good business communications both internal and external to the Town Council, and provide for consistent and professional application of the Town Council's principles via electronic communications

Scope

This policy applies to all users of the Town Council's systems and all personal electronic communications by Councillors and staff used externally from the Town Council.

Responsibilities

All staff and councillors must comply with this policy.

The Town Clerk and Council shall ensure that this policy is up to date, complies with relevant legislation and guidelines and that compliance with this policy is regularly reviewed.

Any breach of this policy by councillors will be reported to the Chelmsford City Council Monitoring Officer and disciplinary action may result. A breach of this policy by staff could lead to staff disciplinary action, or prosecution for legal and/or contractual breaches.

Policy - Email

The Town Council has provided all Councillors with a dedicated Town Council email account for use with Town Council business.

Email accounts provided are Town Council accounts, **NOT** private accounts, and may be accessed by other users in the absence of the account holder to ensure that the Town Council can continue to conduct its operations, with the appropriate authorisations.

All Councillors should use their own dedicated Town Council email address for all official Town Council business and not personal use. Town Council email addresses should not be used by anyone other than the Town Councillor to whom the Town Council email address has been assigned.

Any official Town Council business held by Councillors in their own private email accounts is still subject to the Freedom of Information 2000 Act (FOI) and data protection 2018 Act and therefore their individual account can be searched for requested information.

Deleting or concealing information with the intention of preventing its disclosure following receipt of a FOI request is a criminal offence under section 77 of the FOI Act and the person concealing the information is liable to prosecution. (Refer to our data protection policy).

- When composing and sending emails, users should remember that it is the equivalent of sending the recipient(s) a memo or letter on Town Council stationery.

- While it is not compulsory for councillors to use a dedicated Town Council email address it is strongly encouraged. Doing so makes it easier for the Town Council to process personal data securely.
- The use of personal or other work email accounts makes it more complicated for the Town Council to comply with GDPR and therefore Town Councillors are strongly encouraged to use the Town Council email address assigned to them when acting in their capacity as a Town Councillor.

Users must ensure that:

- Emails and/or messages sent do not contain derogatory or defamatory comments or remarks. Nor contain indecent, sexist, racist or other discriminatory remarks. Such content may lead to legal action against the sender and/or The Town Council for defamation, libel or harassment claims. What may appear to be a joke to some, others may consider offensive and/or distressing.
- They do not use the email and/or messaging system to send or receive obscene, explicit, or illegal material.
- Should they receive an unsolicited email that appears to contain such material, users must note the sender and date and time of receipt and report the incident to the Town Clerk.
- Emails and messages sent do not contain, nor have attached, any document containing confidential information or information covered by non-disclosure conditions unless essential and agreed with the parties involved.
- Emails/messages do not contain, nor have attached any text or images that would breach copyright or intellectual property rights of third parties.
- The Town Council strongly discourage users from responding to, generating, or forwarding emails/messages received from friends or colleagues that contain jokes, pictures, games or other similar non-work-related content.
- Users should be aware that an exchange of emails/messages can be sufficient to be contractually binding on the organisations or individuals concerned.
- Emails are not sent that could contravene the Councillors' Code of Conduct, for example around pre-determination on agenda items.
- Councillors or officers are not CC'd emails unless the subject matter specifically relates to them or their responsibilities.
- It is recommended that Councillors change their passwords every 6 months.

Users should be aware that email is a tool used by malicious individuals to attack IT systems. By clicking on a link or opening an attachment a user malicious software to be downloaded onto the Council's systems. Effects can range from loss of service through to data theft. Defences are built into the system to reduce the risk, but these are not infallible. Users should always exercise caution and are advised not to open attachments or click on links especially if an email comes from an unknown source or is unexpected from a known contact. In case of any doubts Users are advised not to open the email or click on attachments or links and to contact the Town Clerk or the Town Council computer software provider.

Virtual Meetings

While all Council meetings must take place in person, the Council's chosen and supported online meeting platform for other meetings, such as working group meetings, is Microsoft Teams and councillors are encouraged to use this where appropriate for working group meetings.

In preparation for the meeting the Town Clerk will make available

- The Microsoft Teams meeting link (as well as the meeting ID and passcode for outside participants).

Councillors are reminded that normal standards of etiquette as outlined in the Councillors Code of Conduct apply to virtual and online meetings.

Councillors are also reminded that non-Council membership of working group meetings is allowed and should be conscious to remind non-councillor members of the need to adhere to the Code of Conduct and the need for respect for all participants.

Other electronic and instant messaging platforms

Councillors and staff are reminded that the same policies which apply to the use of email apply to other electronic and instant messaging platforms such as WhatsApp and Facebook Messenger and that messages sent on these platforms are subject to the FOI and Data Protection Acts where a staff member or Councillor are representing themselves as such.

Document Access and Storage

Councillors and staff will be provided with access to the Council's online storage systems as appropriate for their roles.

Access to the council's IT systems is controlled by the use of user IDs and passwords.

All User IDs and passwords are uniquely assigned to named individuals and consequently, individuals are accountable for all actions on the IT systems.

Individuals must not:

- Leave their user accounts logged in at an unattended and unlocked computer
- Leave their password unprotected
- Perform any unauthorised changes to the IT systems or information
- Attempt to access data that they are not authorised to use or access
- Exceed the limits of their authorisation or specific business needs to interrogate the system or data
- Connect any unauthorised device to the council's network or IT systems
- Store council data on any unauthorised equipment
- Give or transfer council data or software to any person or organisation outside the council without the appropriate authority to do so
- Line managers must ensure that individuals are given clear direction on the extent and limits of their authority regarding IT systems and data.
- Individuals must not store personal files, such as music, video, photographs or games on council IT equipment or cloud systems.

Review date: January 2024

Next review: January 2025

Adequate and effective system of Internal Control and Internal Audit

In line with the Regulation 6 of the Accounts and Audit Regulations 2015

The Council's internal controls include the following:

- Safe and efficient arrangements to safeguard public money
- Regular scrutiny of financial records and proper arrangements for the approval of expenditure
- Recording in the minutes the precise powers under which expenditure is being approved
- Regular employer returns to HM Revenue and Customs
- Regular returns of VAT; training the responsible officer in matters of VAT and other taxation issues as necessary
- Regular budget monitoring statements
- Procedures for dealing with and monitoring grants or loans made or received
- Minutes properly numbered and paginated with a master copy kept in safekeeping
- Documented procedures to deal with enquiries from the public
- Documented procedures to deal with responses to consultation requests
- Documented procedures for document receipt, circulation, response, handling and filing
- Procedures in place for recording and monitoring Members' interests and Gifts and Hospitality received
- Adoption of codes of conduct for members and employees

Internal Audit Assurance:

Internal audit testing may include:

- Review of the internal controls in place and their documentation
- Review of the minutes to ensure legal powers in place, recorded and correctly applied

Review date: January 2024

Next review: January 2025

- Testing of income and expenditure from minutes to cashbook, from bank statements to cashbook, from minutes to statements etc. including petty cash transactions
- Review and testing of arrangements to prevent and detect fraud and corruption
- Testing of disclosures
- Testing of specific internal controls and reporting findings to management

Independence

The present Internal Auditor is David Buckettt

- they are completely independent of the Town Council
- they play no part in the Council's management, control or decision making.
- they are a professional company with experience of local government and a good understanding of local councils.
- they have no input into other Council financial matters e.g. accounting, financial statements, annual return (other than signing Section 4, Annual Internal Audit Report)

Competence

After each visit the Internal Auditor submits a report which is considered by the Finance and Projects Committee, actioned where appropriate and recorded in the minutes. The Town Council has been fully satisfied with the independent services provided by the Internal Auditor.

The review of the effectiveness of the system of internal audit should be carried out annually by the Finance and Projects Committee.

Review date: January 2024

Next review: January 2025

South Woodham Ferrers Town Council

Financial Risk Assessment

<i>Subject</i>	<i>Risk</i>	<i>Impact</i>	<i>Control Measures</i>	<i>Comments/Recommendations</i>
Loss of monies/goods	Low	Medium	Robust systems for tracking and accounting for income. Processes subject to regular independent audit review. Insurance cover provided for Council monies. Effective asset/inventory lists maintained and regularly checked. At present cash is accepted for Film Club and Toddler Group and adhoc events although a card machine Sum Up is used/recommended when possible. <i>Town council has a bacs payment system through Unity Trust (the Councils bank) operate a secure dual authorisation system.</i>	
Fraudulent cheque payments	Low	High	Payments only authorised by nominated elected members. Effective systems to account for payments. Bank transactions subject to monthly reconciliation and periodic inspection by independent audit.	
Bank error	Low	Low	Bank statements regularly checked and subject to periodic sampling by independent auditor	
Maintaining value for money with goods/services purchase	Low	Low	Procedures to market test purchasing provided for within the adopted Financial Regulations. Larger contracts/purchases subject to detailed review by elected members	
Cash flow management	Low	Medium	Cash levels subject to continuous review including the level of available reserves. Financial information systems assist in tracking anticipated expenditure and income.	

			VAT refund applications are completed each quarter. The Council's financial information system is able to process data for VAT refunds.	
Freedom of Information and Data Protection	Low	Medium	The Town council has the following documents in place: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Privacy policy • Data protection policy • Document retention policy 	
Insurance provision	Medium	High	Insurance is regularly reviewed with an annual update of the Schedule completed each year. Staff receive regular advice from insurers and LCAS. Insurance policy is reviewed: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Annually • When assets are purchased or disposed of • Changes in business activity changes which has an implication on insurance provision. Details of insurance are subject to review both by elected members and by the Council's auditor.	
Payroll and pension systems	Low	Medium	Specialist contractors are used to provides payroll and pension services. All documents are forwarded in a format which cannot be amended by The Town Council. Review/reconciliation of pensions completed by Essex County Council.	

			All payroll and pension systems are subject to regular review by the Council's auditor.	
Ultra Vires expenditure	Low	Medium	Experienced and qualified (CiLCA) Town Clerk is employed to assist the Council with help manage this risk. The Council now has extensive opportunities now it has adopted use of the General Power of Competence (Localism Act 2011).	
Unexpected major costs or loss of income	Low	High	Risk management approach is adopted by the Council. Significant levels of reserves are maintained by the Council for contingencies. Insurance is provided for loss of business and business income. Earmarked Reserves are maintained for a number of key services that will/may require significant investment to maintain. This provides the opportunity to spread anticipated costs over a number of years.	
Effective budget setting	Low	High	A well-structured approach is in place for the setting of budgets and calculation of precepts that includes both reference to performance in previous and current years and ensures that the Council's Committees can consider both ongoing costs and income as well as identify supported projects/service developments in the year ahead. Final budget setting by the full Town Council is at a subsequent meeting in public scheduled to coincide with the billing authority's timescales to ensure Precept demands are provided	

			in good time.	
--	--	--	---------------	--

Completed by:	Mrs K Atkins Town Clerk
Date:	16 January 2024
Review date:	January 2025



WHISTLEBLOWING POLICY & PROCEDURE

Purpose

This policy sets out the way in which individuals may raise any concerns that they have about South Woodham Ferrers Town Council's conduct and how those concerns will be dealt with.

Scope

This procedure applies to all permanent and fixed-term employees, whether full-time or part-time.

Document Support

If, after reading this document, you need further help, please contact the Town Clerk.

Policy

It is important to the Town Council that any fraud, misconduct or wrongdoing by staff or others working on behalf of the Town Council is reported and properly dealt with. We therefore require all individuals to raise any concerns that they may have about the conduct of others in the Town Council or the way in which the Town Council is run.

Background

The Public Interest Disclosure Act 1998 amended the Employment Rights Act 1996 to provide protection for workers who raise legitimate concerns about specified matters of the public interest. These are called "qualifying disclosures". A qualifying disclosure is one made by an employee who has a reasonable belief that.

- A criminal offence.
- A miscarriage of justice.
- An act creating risk to health and safety.
- An act causing damage to the environment.
- A breach of any other legal obligation; or
- Concealment of any of the above.

is being, has been, or is likely to be, committed. It is not necessary for the worker to have proof that such an act is being, has been, or is likely to be, committed - a reasonable belief is sufficient. The worker has no responsibility for investigating the matter - it is our responsibility to ensure that an investigation takes place.

A worker who makes such a protected disclosure has the right not to be dismissed,

subjected to any other detriment, or victimised, because he/she has made a disclosure.

We encourage workers to raise their concerns under this procedure in the first instance. If you are not sure whether to raise a concern, you should discuss the issue with the Town Clerk or the Town Mayor. If you wish to raise a qualifying disclosure relating to the acts or omissions of the Town Clerk, you should raise the matter with the Town Mayor.

Principles

- Everyone should be aware of the importance of preventing and eliminating wrongdoing at work. Staff and others working on behalf of the Town Council should be watchful for illegal or unethical conduct and report anything of that nature that they become aware of.
- Any matter raised under this procedure will be investigated thoroughly, promptly and confidentially, and the outcome of the investigation reported back to the person who raised the issue.
 - No employee or other person working on behalf of the Town Council will be victimised for raising a matter under this procedure. This means that the continued employment and opportunities for future promotion or training of the worker will not be prejudiced because they have raised a legitimate concern.
- Victimisation of an individual for raising a qualified disclosure will be a disciplinary offence.
- If misconduct is discovered because of any investigation under this procedure our disciplinary procedure will be used, in addition to any appropriate external measures.
- Maliciously making a false allegation is a disciplinary offence.
- An instruction to cover up wrongdoing is itself a disciplinary offence. If told not to raise or pursue any concern, even by a person in authority such as a manager, you should not agree to remain silent. You should report the matter to the Town Clerk or Town Mayor.

Procedure

This procedure is for disclosures about matters other than a breach of an employee's own contract of employment. If you are concerned that your own contract has been, or is likely to be, broken, you should use our Grievance Procedure.

Stage 1

In the first instance, any concerns should be raised with the Town Clerk. If you believe your manager to be involved, or for any reason do not wish to approach your manager, then you should proceed straight to stage 3.

Stage 2

The Town Clerk will arrange an investigation of the matter (either by investigating the matter themselves or immediately passing the issue to The Town Mayor). The investigation may involve you and other individuals involved giving a written

statement. Any investigation will be conducted in accordance with the principles set out above. Your statement will be considered, and you will be asked to comment on any additional evidence obtained. Your manager (or the person who conducted the investigation) will then report to the Staffing Committee who will take any necessary action, including reporting the matter to any appropriate government department or regulatory agency. If disciplinary action is required, the Town Clerk (or the person who conducted the investigation) will report the matter to the HR Advisers – for advice - and start the disciplinary procedure. On conclusion of any investigation, you will be told the outcome of the investigation and what the Town Council has done, or proposes to do, about it. If no action is to be taken, the reason for this will be explained.

Stage 3

If you are concerned that the Town Clerk is involved in the wrongdoing, has failed to make a proper investigation or has failed to report the outcome of the investigations to the relevant person, you should escalate the matter to the appropriate person as set out in the Escalation Table at the end of this document. This person will arrange for a review of the investigation to be conducted and make any necessary enquiries and make their own report to the next person in the Escalation Table. Any approach to the more senior person will be treated with the strictest confidence and your identity will not be disclosed without your prior consent.

If you believe the Town Clerk participates in the wrongdoing, you should escalate the matter to the Town Mayor.

Stage 4

If in the conclusion of stages 1, 2 and 3 you believe that the appropriate action has not been taken, you should report the matter to the proper authority. The legislation sets out a number of bodies to which qualifying disclosures may be made. These include:

- The Monitoring Officer at Chelmsford City Council
- HM Revenue & Customs.
- the Financial Conduct Authority.
- the Health and Safety Executive.
- the Environment Agency.
- the Serious Fraud Office.
- the Charity Commission.
- the Care Quality Commission.
- the Children’s Commissioner.
- the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children.
- the Health and Care Professions Council.
- the Chief Inspector of Education, Children’s Services and Skills.
- the Homes and Communities Agency.
- the Pensions Regulator.
- the Information Commissioner
- Protect, for whistleblowing advice (<https://protect-advice.org.uk/>)

You can find the full list in The Public Interest Disclosure (Prescribed Persons) Order 2014

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/blowing-the-whistle-list-of-prescribed-people-and-bodies--2/whistleblowing-list-of-prescribed-people-and-bodies>

Escalation Table

Town Clerk > Town Mayor > Staffing Committee > Council

Protecting whistleblowers

If you raise a concern under this policy, we will support you fully even if we find, through our investigations, that you made a mistake or that there has been no breach of policy, legal obligation or other activity set out in this policy. If you feel you have been treated badly as a result of raising a concern, you must tell us straightaway. If the matter remains unresolved, you must follow the formal process in our grievance procedure.

All whistleblowers are given the same protection, so you must not threaten or otherwise badly treat others who have raised concerns under this policy. If you do, you may face disciplinary action which could include dismissal for gross misconduct. The whistleblower may also be able to bring legal action against you.

Data protection

When an individual makes a disclosure, the Town Council will process any personal data collected in accordance with its data protection policy. Data collected from the point at which you make the report is held securely and accessed by, and disclosed to, individuals only for the purpose of dealing with the disclosure.

This is a non-contractual policy and procedure which will be reviewed from time to time.

Reviewed 16 January 2024

Next review 14 January 2025

Hall Hire/Facility Grants Policy

The South Woodham Ferrers Town Council Hall Hire/Facilities Grant is a small grants scheme funded by South Woodham Ferrers Town Council. Applications are invited from bodies which are within the administrative area covered by South Woodham Ferrers and are broadly representative of their local community or neighbourhood.

The grant can be used to:

- Hire rooms at Champions Manor Hall.
- Hire of storage at Champions Manor Hall
- Hire the bandstand in town.
- Hire of the car park at Champions Manor Hall

Grants: Grants will be based on the merits of the individual application, eligibility criteria and the funds available from the grant budget in the applicable financial year. The Town Council is under no obligation to make a grant award for hall/facilities hire just because an application has been made.

Grants will not be considered retrospectively.

Who can apply?

Applications are invited from the eligible local community e.g., local voluntary organisations, community groups and sports/recreational clubs based in the town that operate on a non-for-profit basis. This includes preschools, youth clubs, community associations, community event groups, senior citizen social clubs, gardening clubs, conservation groups, sports clubs etc. This list is not exhaustive, but all groups must be open to the whole community.

Applications will be judged on their merits and on **the evidence of strong community support and need**, so it is vital that you provide this information.

Any previous applications received will be considered in the decision-making process. Ordinarily, only one grant per organisation per financial year will be considered.

What will not be funded?

- Organisations or activities which do not substantially benefit the residents of the town.
- Organisations or activities which are primarily commercial in nature;
- Organisations which have a closed or restricted membership;
- Organisations who are raising money for a charity;
- Religious or political activities unless unrestricted community benefit can be demonstrated;

- Retrospective applications where the activity or project has already been carried out;
- Groups that are already receiving financial support directly or indirectly from the Town Council;

Qualifying Criteria

- Applications must be able to provide evidence that the hire meets local needs and that there is community support for the hire;
- Applicants must inform the Town Council if they are receiving any other financial contribution from a public body (including a local authority) towards the cost of a hire;
- If the applicant is VAT registered, then the application can only be made for the NET amount.

Conditions

- Where a grant is offered for a hire the Town Council may commit funds payable when the hire is confirmed. In this case the offer will apply for a limited period of up to twelve months; the hire must commence within twelve months of the offer of financial assistance being made. After this time, the offer will have expired;
- Following the award of the grant, payment of the funds from the Town Council must be completed within 12 months of the date of the award;
- Applicants will be informed of the outcome of their application after the meeting of the Finance and Projects Committee;

Grant Application Information

If you wish to apply for financial assistance from the Town Council, please complete the Grants Application Form.

Please complete all sections of the form.

The Town Council will require the following information:

1) For all applications

- Full details of yourself/Organisation/Club;
- What are the aims/purpose of the Organisation/Club are;
- Full details of who is involved and number of members;
- Details of all other Organisations/Clubs/Agencies that are working with you;
- Information on the benefits to South Woodham Ferrers residents;
- Information on how many South Woodham Ferrers residents will benefit;
- The actual amount of money requested from the Council;

- Where the rest of the money requested is to be obtained;
- Details of other organisations, clubs or other agencies approached for help;
- Details of previous applications you have applied for, or received, or any other grants and/or loans from the Town Council will form part of the report presented to the Committee;
- Any other relevant information.

2) For applications over £300

- A full set of last year’s accounts relating to your Club/Organisation – unless you are a newly formed group.

You are invited to attend the Finance and Projects Committee meeting at which your application is considered. Councillors may also wish to ask you questions about the information you have provided.

The Grant application form, accounts and other information will be copied and provided in the public domain for the meeting of the Town Council’s Finance & Projects Committee. Please ensure that the information provided is clear and legible.

Responsible Officer	Town Clerk	Date effective from	Jan 2024	Review date	Jan 2025
----------------------------	------------	----------------------------	----------	--------------------	----------

SWF Town Council's Town Mayors Engagements from 19th November 2024 to 8th January 2025

23rd November 2024 – The Town Mayor and Deputy Mayor attended the South Woodham Ferrers Christmas Fayre

8th December 2024 - The Town Mayor and Deputy Mayor attended the Senior's Christmas Lunch at Champions Manor Hall

13th December 2024 - The Town Mayor and Deputy Mayor attended the Town Carol Service held at Holy Trinity Church

16th December 2024 - The Town Mayor attended the William De Ferrers Presentation Evening to present the winning pupil with the large cheque

20th December 2024 - The Town Mayor and Consort attended the Town Council Pantomime (Jack and the Beanstalk) being held in the Dame Elizabeth Hall at William de Ferrers