

Embleton Parish Council Standing Orders

1. Councillors

- 1.1. Following election or co-option to the Council, each Councillor will be issued with a copy of the Code of Conduct, Standing Orders and Data Consent Form of the Council. They will sign the form of Declaration of Acceptance of Office in the presence of the Clerk of the Council, or of a Councillor who has been specifically designated by the Council for this purpose.
- 1.2. All Councillors will observe the Code of Conduct at all times when on Council business and no member will act in such a way that will bring the Council into disrepute, behave offensively in meetings or obstruct the Council's business.
- 1.3. The Code of Conduct adopted by the Council will define when a Councillor will declare a personal or prejudicial or pecuniary interest in an item for discussion at a Council meeting. The Councillor will declare that interest and the nature of the interest at the earliest opportunity.

2. Annual Meetings

- 2.1. If the Annual Meeting is in an election year it must be held within 14 days after that election. If it is not an election year then the annual meeting will take place on an appropriate day in May.
- 2.2. If the outgoing Chairman is available then he / she will preside until a new Chairman has been elected. The first business of the Annual Meeting will be the election of the Chairman (and Vice Chairman, if appropriate) and to receive and sign their acceptance of office.
- 2.3. The retiring Chairman will report on the activities of the Council for the preceding year.

3. Meetings

- 3.1. Meetings will be held in appropriate, accessible accommodation (or remotely via Zoom whilst Covid-19 restrictions are in place). Unless no other accommodation is available the meetings will not be held in premises used for the supply of alcohol.
- 3.2. An agreed frequency of meetings will be decided at the Annual Meeting and Councillors will be advised of the meetings by the issue of a summons and agenda delivered by email and issued at least three clear business days before the meeting.
- 3.3. Public notices will be posted in conspicuous places informing members of the public of the venue, time, date and business to be transacted at the meeting. The notice will be posted at least three clear working days before the meeting.
- 3.4. Meetings will be open to the public and press but they may be temporarily excluded from the meeting if the business is regarded as confidential.
- 3.5. Members of the public may speak at Council meetings at the discretion of the Chairman of the meeting.

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- 3.6. The agenda for the meeting will be agreed by the Clerk, Chairman or Vice Chairman as appropriate. The agenda will always include an item to enable Councillors to declare interests. An opportunity for public questions will be made available immediately before the commencement of each meeting.
- 3.7. The Council may only take decisions on items clearly specified on the agenda; if agreed by the chairman, any urgent items which are not on the agenda may be discussed, but no decision may be made, at that meeting.
- 3.8. The Chairman of the Council will preside at the meeting and will be responsible for the conduct of that meeting. If the Chairman is not present then the Vice Chairman will preside. If they are not present then the first matter on the agenda will be the election of an appropriate Councillor who will chair the meeting. Whoever chairs the meeting will assume the duties of the Chairman for the meeting.
- 3.9. The quorum for the Council will be one third of the total Councillor places but in any case not fewer than 4. If there be insufficient members present then no business will be transacted and a fresh notice will be issued to reconvene the meeting at a later date.
- 3.10. If at any time during the meeting it ceases to be quorate then the meeting will be adjourned and any further business carried forward to the meeting when next convened.
- 3.11. Voting at the meeting shall be by a show of hands unless a majority of Councillors wants a ballot. Only the proposer and seconder will be recorded in the minutes unless a Councillor requests that their vote is noted. A Councillor may also request that the Clerk records how each Councillor has voted, including abstentions. Any request of this nature will be made before moving on to the next business.
- 3.12. In cases of equal votes the Chairman (or other person presiding) will have a second or casting vote.
- 3.13. A minute of the meeting will be kept by the Clerk or other nominated person in the Clerk's absence. The minutes will record any decisions made by the Council. Draft minutes will be circulated to Councillors as soon as practicable, at the latest within three weeks after the meeting. Councillors will supply any suggested amendments. The minutes will then be approved at the following meeting and signed by the person presiding at that meeting. Draft minutes will be published on PC website labelled 'draft' until these minutes are approved / amended at the following PC meeting. The minutes will then be replaced with the approved version.
- 3.14. An additional meeting of full council may be convened at any time by the Chairman of the council. In addition, if two councillors sign a requisition for a council meeting to be convened, and the Chairman either refuses or neglects to do so for seven days, then any two councillors (not necessarily those who signed the requisition)

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may convene a meeting. Subject to any standing orders made by the council, the Vice-Chairman has the same powers as the Chairman and can exercise these in the Chairman's absence.

- 3.15. The time and date of a scheduled council meeting may be changed or the meeting scheduled meeting may be changed by agreement of at least two of the Executive Officers (see 10.2). If no Executive Officers of the Council are available agreement of two other Councillors is required to change the time or date of a meeting. The Standing Orders in regard to notice of the meeting will still apply.
- 3.16. All planning applications that are submitted to the Parish Council for comment are to be an agenda item. Each member of the PC will be notified of the application by e-mail by the Clerk. It is incumbent on the individual Parish Councillors to access the plans from the NCC web site. All planning applications will be discussed at the next PC meeting after they are received. If necessary special 'planning' Parish Council meetings will be held in August and December. Councillors unable to attend a Council meeting can submit their comments relating to the application to be read out at the Council meeting but only Councillors present at the meeting are eligible to vote. If Councillors views on the application are divided at a meeting then a vote will be taken and the majority view will prevail. This applies to not only whether an objection, support or neutral view be submitted but to the individual clauses to be included. The results of any vote taken will be recorded in the Minutes.

4. Finance

4.1. Responsible Finance Office (RFO)

- 4.1.1. The Responsible Finance Officer is a statutory office and appointed by the Council. The Clerk of the Council will take on this role of managing the Council's financial affairs in accordance with Proper Practices.

4.2. Estimates and Precept

- 4.2.1. The RFO will compile estimates of income and expenditure annually for the Council's consideration. The Council will review the budget not later than the end of December in preparation for the precept being agreed and submitted to the Local Authority in January. During the year the budget will be reviewed against actual expenditure and income. Amendments to the budget will be discussed in Council and changes minuted.

4.3. Income and Expenditure

- 4.3.1. The RFO will supply regular updates of income and expenditure throughout the year and detail actual figures against estimate. Significant underspends or overspends will be brought to the attention of the Council and action taken to address any discrepancies. Underspent revenue will be identified and earmarked to reserves by a Council resolution.

4.4. Accounting and Audit

- 4.4.1. The RFO will determine all accounting procedures and financial records of the Council in accordance with the Accounts and Audit Regulations.
- 4.4.2. The RFO will complete the annual financial statements of the Council including the annual return as soon as practicable after the end of the financial year and will submit and report on them to the Council. The Council will review each year and ensure that there is an adequate, effective system of internal audit of the Council's accounting, financial and other procedures in line with Proper Practice.
- 4.4.3. An Internal Auditor will be appointed by the Council to carry out the work required to comply with the Proper Practice. The person appointed will be competent and independent of the operation of the Council.
- 4.4.4. The RFO will submit the Annual Return to the External Auditor by the due date, ensuring the return is complete.

4.5. Banking Arrangements and Cheques

- 4.5.1. The Council's banking arrangements, including the Bank Mandate, will be made by the RFO and approved by the Council. They will be regularly reviewed for efficiency.
- 4.5.2. A resolution of the Council will nominate at least three members to be authorised by the Council to sign cheques.
- 4.5.3. All items of expenditure to be paid by cheque or BACS will be authorised by the Council and the payments approved. The RFO will examine invoices and verify and certify the expenditure. Cheques will be completed for all transactions and signed by two authorised Councillors.
- 4.5.4. The Chairman has the authority to approve discretionary spending on PC matters up to the sum of £50 where required between PC Meetings.
- 4.5.5. Any utility bill may be paid by Direct Debit provided that the instructions are signed by two authorised Councillors.

4.6. Loans and Investments

- 4.6.1. All loans and investments will be negotiated in the name of the Council and will be set for a period approved by the Council.
- 4.6.2. All borrowings will be in the name of the Council and will not be entered into until necessary approvals have been given. Any application will be approved by Council, especially the terms and purpose. These terms must be reviewed annually.

- 4.6.3. All investments of money under the control of the Council will be in the name of the Council and all certificates or other documents will be retained by the RFO.

4.7. Contracts and Purchase Orders

- 4.7.1. An official order or letter will be issued for all work or service paid for by the Council. All Councillors and officers are responsible for obtaining good value for money at all times. An officer placing an order on behalf of the Council will ensure that good value and appropriate terms are obtained for the transaction.
- 4.7.2. Orders for values £500 to £2000 require a minimum of two quotations; for values above £2000 three quotations are required. Contracts exceeding £50,000 require additional safeguards and will follow Proper Practice.
- 4.7.3. All estimates will be approved by the Council; while the Council is not obliged to accept the lowest quotation the reasons for accepting the quotation will be recorded.

4.8. Assets

- 4.8.1. The RFO will ensure that an appropriate and accurate Register of Assets is maintained by the Council. It will be reviewed annually, in conjunction with a health and safety inspection of assets if appropriate.

4.9. VAT

- 4.9.1. The RFO will promptly complete any VAT Return that is required. Any repayment claim due in accordance with the VAT Act 1974 section 33 will be made at least annually coinciding with the financial year.

5. Insurance

- 5.1. Following the annual risk assessment, the Council will review the level of insurance cover and ensure it is adequate and appropriate for the activities of the Council. Minimum cover will include Public Liability, Employers Liability, Money and Fidelity Guarantee.

6. Risk Assessment

- 6.1. A risk assessment will be undertaken annually of all the activities of the Council and a report approved by the Council. This assessment will also cover the appropriateness of the internal audit arrangements. The Risk Assessment will be reviewed annually.
- 6.2. If the Council undertakes a new activity not covered by the existing risk assessment an assessment will be undertaken before the activity commences.

7. Freedom of Information

- 7.1. The Council is subject to the Freedom of Information Act, and has adopted the Model Publication Scheme for Parish Councils. The Clerk will ensure the Council conforms to the requirements of the Act allowing public access to the appropriate documents.

8. Clerk to the Council

- 8.1. The Council may appoint a number of employees to assist it in the performance of its duties. The Council will appoint a Clerk to the Council which will be on an employed basis, unless the Clerk is a member of the Council, acting in an unpaid capacity.
- 8.2. The Clerk will act as the Proper Officer of the Council, and he/she will: receive the Declarations of Acceptance of Office and notices disclosing interests; sign documents on behalf of the Council and issue agendas and notices of meetings; receive and distribute plans and documents on behalf of the Council; and also advise the bank of changes to mandates with the bank.
- 8.3. The Clerk will act as Responsible Financial Officer or be responsible for managing a Finance Officer or other employees of the Council.
- 8.4. As an employee of the Council the Clerk is covered by employment legislation dealing with employment rights, discrimination in employment, unfair dismissal, redundancy and similar matters. The Clerk will therefore have a contract of employment stating the terms and conditions under which he/she is employed. This will effectively be administered by the Chairman or designated Councillor acting with the authority of the Council.

9. Committees and task and finish groups

- 9.1. The Council from time to time may set up committees and task-and-finish groups to undertake work on behalf of the Council. The Council will set their Terms of reference, and they will report periodically to the Council.

10. Emergency Business

- 10.1. Should it not be appropriate to convene a special meeting then any emergency business will be handled by at least two of the Executive Officers of the Council in consultation. If only one Executive Officer of the Council is available that Officer must consult at least two other Councillors. Actions will be reported promptly to the Council.
- 10.2. The Chair, Vice-Chair and Clerk will become Executive Officers of the Council when they take up those positions and will cease to be Executive Officers when they relinquish their positions.

11. Alteration or Reversal of previous decisions

- 11.1. Decisions of the Council will not be revised within 4 months, except where a special item is placed on the agenda bearing the name of two Councillors and is considered and approved by the Council.

12. Standing Orders

- 12.1. These and any other standing orders will be reviewed annually by the Clerk and the Chairman, and any amendments will be decided by the Council.

- 12.2. During the course of meetings of the Council, the Chairman's decision as to the interpretation of the standing orders will be final. In cases of doubt, the Council will seek the advice of the Northumberland Association of Local Councils.
- 12.3. The Council may resolve to suspend a Standing Order, in order to progress the business of the Council, and such decision will be included in the minutes. The suspension will not be taken lightly and it will be time-limited.

13. Co-opting of councillors

- 13.1 If following the election of the council, or at any other time, the number of councillors is less than 10 then the council has a duty to fill the vacancies.
- 13.2 When a vacancy arises this will be raised at the next meeting of the council. Following the meeting the clerk will place notices on the Parish Council notice boards indicating the vacancy or vacancies and noting that an election will be called if 10 or more electors notify the Northumberland County Council Returning Officer in writing requesting such election.
- 13.3 If an election is not to be held the clerk will publish notices asking any elector who wishes to be considered for co-option to submit their names in writing together with a brief resume to the clerk within 14 working days of the date of the notice. This would not specifically exclude anyone who applied up to the actual day of a Parish Council Meeting. A guidance note will be sent out by the Parish Clerk to all interested candidates explaining what is expected from a parish councillor. It is expected that applicants would have attended at least one Parish Council meeting prior to applying.
- 13.4 If there is only one applicant for one vacancy, the applicant will be co-opted to the Council providing Councillors agree that the candidate is suitable following interview. If there is more than one candidate, any letters / contact received are circulated to Councillors ahead of the meeting at which a Councillor is to be co-opted.
- 13.5 At the Council meeting the public, press and candidates are requested to leave the room and the candidates are individually invited back into the room one at a time to say something about themselves including why they are interested in being a parish councillor, what they could bring to the Council and what they believe the role entails. Each candidate will be allocated a maximum of five minutes. Councillors are given the opportunity to ask questions of the candidates.
- 13.6 In a closed session of the Council and without the candidates, press and the public present, Councillors will consider the candidates. Councillors may decide not to select any of the candidates and the reasons for this decision do not need to be recorded nor conveyed to the candidates. Following discussion, the

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public, press and the candidate (s) are invited back into the meeting before a decision not to select any of the candidates is announced or voting takes place.

- 13.7 If any of the candidates are deemed suitable for co-option, the Chairman will then place the names of those nominated into alphabetical order and proceed to vote. Councillors will have one vote per vacancy to be filled.
- 13.8 Voting by a secret ballot will continue until one candidate has received an absolute majority of those Councillors present. The chosen Candidate will require 2 Parish Councillors to propose and second their appointment to the Parish Council. If there is only one vacancy, a Councillor may only nominate or second one candidate. One candidate needs to receive a majority vote. At this stage, the successful candidate will be declared co-opted.
- 13.9 Should no single candidate receive a majority on the first vote, the candidate with the lowest number of votes is eliminated. Voting will then take place for the remaining candidates until one person receives an absolute majority. The successful candidate is then declared co-opted to the Parish Council and will be asked to join the meeting. The successful candidate is a councillor in their own right and is no different to any other member once they are appointed and have signed the declaration of acceptance of office. Councillors appointed by the Council hold office until the next ordinary election.

These Standing Orders were adopted by the Embleton Parish Council at a meeting of the Council held on 26th October 2020.