

Royston Town Council meeting – Monday 12th September 2022

Agenda Item 8 - Proposed Communications Working Party

While it is important to get things done for the residents of our town it is equally important that they know what is being done and how their tax is being spent. I believe firmly that we can improve our levels of communication and make better use of the channels open to us, so that more residents are aware of our activities and the role we fulfil.

We currently have a relatively newly developed website and a Twitter feed. We also make use of physical noticeboards around the town. Various parts of the council activities/staff maintain their own Facebook pages (market, cave).

As part of the Quality Town certification we are obliged to produce a newsletter on a quarterly basis; this is the existing Town Crier, which appears in the Listing Magazine and has not changed in format for some time. Many people do not seem to be aware that this is a Town Council publication and not just another part of the Listing Magazine.

I therefore propose that a working party is set up with the remit of:

- Consulting a broad cross section of the public on the ways they would wish to receive information from the Town Council, making recommendations to Council for further actions based on these, and carrying out any actions approved by Council in this regard
- Drawing up a communications strategy for the next 4 years to incorporate existing and new methods of communication for the Town Council with the public, for approval by Council.
- Within the context of the strategy, reviewing the format and delivery mechanism of the “Town Crier” to recommend any possible changes to Council.

Council are asked to **approve this motion** and to **instruct the clerk and staff to draw up Terms of Reference** for the working party. It is suggested that including external individuals or groups would be beneficial for their expertise in communications methods and channels.

Relevant policies:

Statement of intent of community engagement

<https://www.roystontowncouncil.gov.uk/ UserFiles/Files/Statement%20of%20Intent%20Community%20Engagement%202022.pdf>

Social media policy

<https://www.roystontowncouncil.gov.uk/ UserFiles/Files/Policies/Social%20media%20policy%202020.pdf>

Social media comment policy

<https://www.roystontowncouncil.gov.uk/ UserFiles/Files/Policies/Social%20Media%20comment%20policy%202017.pdf>

Agenda item 9 – Management of Royston Cave

Background

Royston Town Council owns Royston Cave.

From 1st March 2022 the management of Royston Cave has been undertaken by the Royston Museum Trust CIO. This agreement ends on 30th September 2022.

The Council pays the Trust £833.33 per month.

Nicky Paton is the Cave Manager and his responsibilities include:

- Oversee strategic development of Royston Cave
- Recruit, manage and coordinate a Cave Officer, and guides
- Delegate all non-strategic activities wherever possible
- Create and deliver successful grant applications
- Develop the Cave's brand, marketing, and visitor experience
- Explore new channels of visitor growth, revenue, and research
- Coordinate site maintenance and conservation
- Liaise with and report to Royston Town Council, the Cave Advisory sub-committee, the Cave Trust Fund, and other stakeholders
- Engage with visitor, research, and media enquiries

Emma Shaw is the Cave Officer and her responsibilities include:

- Report to the Cave Manager
- Manage and complete all delegated tasks, as required
- Help coordinate rotas, guides, tours, and events
- Help oversee maintenance and liaise with contractors
- Compile research and contribute to written articles
- Help create educational resources and activities
- Engage with third party and visitor enquiries
- Represent Royston Cave and report to stakeholders in the Manager's absence

Nicky and Emma are both employed by the Museum Trust

Achievements since the Cave has been managed by the Trust

The current management team have achieved many things in the last seven months under the management agreement. A copy of the notes from the last Cave Advisory sub-committee meeting held on 26th July is attached detailing these.

Income for the first 4 months of the financial year, April to July 2022, has been £8,929. The annual income target in the budget is £7,500, this has already been exceeded with 8 months left to go.

Benefits of outsourcing the management of the Cave to the Royston Museum Trust CIO

There are two people trained to manage the Cave and so if one resigns or is absent due to leave or sickness then there is full cover. If a Cave Manager were to be employed by RTC then there would be no cover for absence or resignation.

The current management team have a wealth of knowledge about the Cave with one having been manager for 3 years and the other having been a guide throughout the last season as well as Cave Officer. Their skills include marketing, copywriting, website design, design of printed material like signage and leaflets and posters, social media, team management, maintenance and media work.

The existing management team have achieved many things during the first seven month period of the management agreement and it is going from strength to strength.

There are no recruitment costs.

There is a natural synergy between the Museum and the Cave and there are benefits to having the management under one roof:

Activities for both outlets can be combined.

Cave merchandise can be sold at the museum at no charge to the council which generates income.

The Cave promotes the Museum and vice versa which improves visitor/tourist experiences.

PROPOSAL

Royston Museum Trust maintains the responsibility for the management of the Cave until 31st December 2023, when a further review of the management agreement will take place.

MUSEUM TRUST RESPONSIBILITIES

The Trust will manage the Cave on behalf of the Council.

The Trust will employ a Cave Manager and a Cave Officer.

TOWN COUNCIL RESPONSIBILITIES

Royston Town Council owns Royston Cave.

The Council will pay the Trust £833.33 per month.

The Council will authorise, contract and pay directly for any other expenditure and will continue to receive and retain admissions income.

The Council will remain responsible for the employment, payroll and payment of the guides.

The Council will remain responsible for the insurances associated with the Cave, other than employer related insurances for the Museum Trust employees providing management services for the Cave.

The Cave Advisory sub-committee and Royston Cave Trust Fund will continue to function and must include at least 1 Museum Trustee (they currently do so).

Members are to RESOLVE that Royston Museum Trust maintains the responsibility for the management of the Cave until 31st December 2023, on the existing terms and conditions, when a further review of the management agreement will take place.

Councillors Beardwell, Langdon and Harrison

Agenda Item 10 – Draft social media policy

Royston Town Council

Social Media Policy

Approved by Full Council September 2022 Minute number: XX/23

Review date: September 2025

1. Policy statement

1.1 This policy is intended to help Councillors and council staff make appropriate decisions about the use of social media such as emails, blogs, wikis, social networking websites, WhatsApp groups, podcasts, forums, message boards, or comments on Twitter, Facebook, LinkedIn and other relevant social media websites.

1.2 This policy provides information and guidelines to Councillors and council staff to observe when using social media, the circumstances in which the Council will monitor the use of social media and the action to be taken in respect of breaches of this policy.

1.3 This policy supplements, and should be read in conjunction with, all other policies and procedures adopted by the Council, such as the Equality and Diversity Policy, Member Officer Protocol, Data Protection Policy, Disciplinary Procedure, Members Code of Conduct and such like.

1.4 This policy does not form part of any contract of employment and it may be amended at any time.

2. Who is covered by this policy?

2.1 This policy covers all individuals working at all levels within the Council, including all elected and co-opted Councillors, volunteers and council staff.

3. The scope of this policy

3.1 The council has overall responsibility for the effective operation of this policy. All Members and staff are expected to comply with this policy at all times to protect the reputation, privacy, confidentiality, and interests of the Council, its services, employees, partners and community.

3.2 Behaviour required by the Members' Code of Conduct shall apply to online activity in the same way it does to other written or verbal communication. Online content should be objective, balanced, informative and accurate. Members must be aware that their profile as a Councillor means the more likely it is they will be seen as acting in an official capacity when blogging or networking. Inappropriate use of social media by Members could amount to a breach of the Members Code of Conduct. Members should be honest and open, but mindful of the impact their contribution might make to people's perceptions of the council.

3.3 All employees, volunteers and members should ensure that they take the time to read and understand this policy. Everyone is personally responsible for content they publish.

4. Guidelines for using social media.

4.1 Councillors and staff must not allow their interaction on any websites or blogs to damage their working relationships with others. They should not make any derogatory, discriminatory, defamatory, abusive, obscene or offensive comments.

As a staff member or as a Councillor you should always:

- Be responsible and respectful; be direct, informative, brief and transparent.
- Avoid making false or misleading statements.
- Be mindful of the information posted on sites and make sure personal opinions are not published as being that of the Council.
- Keep the tone of comments respectful and informative.
- Refrain from posting controversial or potentially inflammatory remarks. Language that may be deemed as offensive relating in particular to race, sexuality, disability, gender, age or religion or belief should not be published on any social media site.
- Avoid personal attacks, online fights and hostile communications.
- Only make comments that you would also be prepared to make in writing or face to face.
- Seek permission to publish original photographs or videos from the persons or organisations in the video or photograph before they are uploaded. Check that there is parental permission before photos of children are used.
- Respect the privacy of other Councillors, staff and residents.
- Avoid posting any information or conduct any online activity that may violate laws or regulations, such as libel, copyright or general data protection regulations (GDPR).
- Ensure commercially sensitive, personal, private or confidential information is not disclosed. Never publish anyone else's contact details without permission.
- Consider if naming individuals is appropriate or necessary, and refer to GDPR. If in doubt, consult with the Clerk.
- Think about how the public may perceive who you follow on social media.

4.2 Individual Councillors and officers are responsible for what they post. They are personally responsible for any online activity. Councillors must make it clear whether they are speaking from a personal perspective or as a Member representing the Council or as a Member of a political party.

5. Council website and social media pages

5.1 The Clerk will be the nominated person to act as moderator on official council pages. The Clerk will have authority to instruct officers to immediately, without notice or comment, remove any posts from the Council's social media pages if they are deemed to be inflammatory or of a defamatory or libellous nature.

5.2 Council officers will be appointed to maintain the Council's website and social media pages. These will be used to communicate council business to the public and will include:

- Notices and minutes of meetings.
- Advertisements for events and activities.
- Good news stories.
- Advertisements for vacancies.
- Information from partners i.e. Police, District council, County Council etc.
- Announcements regarding the Council.
- Posting or sharing information promoting bodies for community benefit.
- Posting other items as the Council see fit.
- Sharing information from affiliated organisations i.e. RAGA and the Twinning Association
- Posting information regarding events and functions that the Town Mayor has attended

5.3 All social media sites in use should be checked on a regular basis to ensure the appropriate security settings are in place.

6. Monitoring use of social media websites.

6.1 Any use of social media websites (whether or not accessed for council purposes) may be monitored.

6.2 Misuse of social media websites can, in certain circumstances, constitute a criminal offence or otherwise give risk to legal liability against you and the Council.

6.3 Residents and councillors should be aware that not all communication through social media requires a response, although an acknowledgement should be made if appropriate.

6.4 If a matter raised in any form of social media needs further consideration by the Council it may be raised as an agenda item for consideration by the Council or a committee. Any response agreed by the Council will be recorded in the minutes of the meeting.

6.5 Reports of any concerns regarding content placed on social media sites should be reported to the Clerk for referral to the Council as required.

7. Policy Review

September 2025, or earlier if legislation dictates.

Agenda Item 11 - Draft Equality and Diversity policy

**Royston Town Council
Equality and Diversity Policy
Approved by Full Council 12th September 2022 Minute number XX/XX
Review date - September 2025**

Our commitment as an employer

The council is committed to providing equal opportunities in employment and to avoiding unlawful discrimination.

This policy is intended to assist the council to put this commitment into practice. Compliance with this policy should also ensure that employees and councillors do not commit unlawful acts of discrimination.

Striving to ensure that the work environment is free of harassment and bullying and that everyone is treated with dignity and respect is an important aspect of ensuring equal opportunities in employment.

Our commitment as a service provider

The council is committed to ensuring that our services are accessible to all by:

- Ensuring that we deliver our services in ways that are sensitive to everyone's needs
- Ensuring that all those in the community are able to visit the community halls, allotments and plantations e.g by continuing to provide hearing loops, step free access, disabled parking and lift access where possible, and continuing to investigate other ways in which our services can be made more accessible.
- Ensuring that the information we provide about our services is accessible to our community.
- Consulting and involving all sections of our community in the development and monitoring of our services in ways which enable people to participate.
- Identifying and addressing the barriers that different groups face to participation in community life.

The law

It is unlawful to discriminate directly or indirectly in recruitment or employment because of age, disability, sex, gender reassignment, pregnancy, maternity, race (which includes colour, nationality, caste and ethnic or national origins), sexual orientation, religion or belief, or because someone is married or in a civil partnership. These are known as "protected characteristics" under the Equality Act 2010.

Discrimination after employment may also be unlawful, e.g. refusing to give a reference for a reason related to one of the protected characteristics.

The council will not discriminate against or harass a member of the public in the provision of services or goods. It is unlawful to fail to make reasonable adjustments to overcome barriers

to using services caused by disability. The duty to make reasonable adjustments includes the removal, adaptation or alteration of physical features, if the physical features make it impossible or unreasonably difficult for disabled people to make use of services. In addition, service providers have an obligation to think ahead and address any barriers that may impede disabled people from accessing a service.

Types of unlawful discrimination

Direct discrimination is where a person is treated less favourably than another because of a protected characteristic.

In limited circumstances, employers can directly discriminate against an individual for a reason related to any of the protected characteristics where there is an occupational requirement. The occupational requirement must be crucial to the post and a proportionate means of achieving a legitimate aim.

Indirect discrimination is where a provision, criterion or practice is applied that is discriminatory in relation to individuals who have a relevant protected characteristic such that it would be to the detriment of people who share that protected characteristic compared with people who do not, and it cannot be shown to be a proportionate means of achieving a legitimate aim.

Harassment is where there is unwanted conduct, related to one of the protected characteristics (other than marriage and civil partnership, and pregnancy and maternity) that has the purpose or effect of violating a person's dignity; or creating an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive environment. It does not matter whether or not this effect was intended by the person responsible for the conduct.

Associative discrimination is where an individual is directly discriminated against or harassed for association with another individual who has a protected characteristic.

Perceptive discrimination is where an individual is directly discriminated against or harassed based on a perception that he/she has a particular protected characteristic when he/she does not, in fact, have that protected characteristic.

Third-party harassment occurs where an employee is harassed and the harassment is related to a protected characteristic, by third parties.

Victimisation occurs where an employee is subjected to a detriment, such as being denied a training opportunity or a promotion because he/she made or supported a complaint or raised a grievance under the Equality Act 2010, or because he/she is suspected of doing so. However, an employee is not protected from victimisation if he/she acted maliciously or made or supported an untrue complaint.

Failure to make reasonable adjustments is where a physical feature or a provision, criterion or practice puts a disabled person at a substantial disadvantage compared with someone who does not have that protected characteristic and the employer has failed to make reasonable adjustments to enable the disabled person to overcome the disadvantage.

Equal opportunities in employment

The council will avoid unlawful discrimination in all aspects of employment including recruitment, promotion, opportunities for training, pay and benefits, discipline and selection for redundancy.

Recruitment

Person and job specifications will be limited to those requirements that are necessary for the effective performance of the job. Candidates for employment or promotion will be assessed objectively against the requirements for the job, taking account of any reasonable adjustments that may be required for candidates with a disability. Disability and personal or home commitments will not form the basis of employment decisions except where necessary.

Working practices

The council will consider any possible indirectly discriminatory effect of its standard working practices, including the number of hours to be worked, the times at which these are to be worked and the place at which work is to be done, when considering requests for variations to these standard working practices and will refuse such requests only if the council considers it has good reasons, unrelated to any protected characteristic, for doing so. The council will comply with its obligations in relation to statutory requests for contract variations. The council will also make reasonable adjustments to its standard working practices to overcome barriers caused by disability.

Dignity at work

The council has a separate dignity at work policy concerning issues of bullying and harassment on any ground, and how complaints of this type will be dealt with.

People not employed by the council

The council will not discriminate unlawfully against those using or seeking to use the services provided by the council.

Training

The council will raise awareness (and provide training when needed) of equal opportunities to those likely to be involved in recruitment or other decision making where equal opportunities issues are likely to arise.

The council will raise awareness of all staff engaged to work at the council to help them understand their rights and responsibilities under the dignity at work policy and what they can do to help create a working environment free of bullying and harassment. The council will provide additional training to managers, if needed, to enable them to deal more effectively with complaints of bullying and harassment.

Your responsibilities

Every employee and councillor is required to assist the council to meet its commitment to provide equal opportunities in employment and avoid unlawful discrimination. Employees and councillors can be held personally liable as well as, or instead of, the council for any act

of unlawful discrimination. Employees or councillors who commit serious acts of harassment may be guilty of a criminal offence.

Acts of discrimination, harassment, bullying or victimisation by employees against other employees or customers are disciplinary offences and will be dealt with under the council's disciplinary procedure. Discrimination, harassment, bullying or victimisation may constitute gross misconduct and could lead to dismissal without notice.

Discrimination, harassment, bullying or victimisation by councillors against employees or customers is contrary to the Code of Conduct and any offences will be dealt with by the Monitoring Officer.

Grievances

If you consider that you may have been unlawfully discriminated against, bullied or harassed, you should use the council's grievance procedure or any other relevant procedure to make a complaint.

The council will take any complaint seriously and will seek to resolve any grievance that it upholds. You will not be penalised for raising a grievance, even if your grievance is not upheld, unless your complaint is both untrue and made in bad faith.

Monitoring and review

This policy will be monitored periodically by the council to judge its effectiveness and will be updated in accordance with changes in the law.

This is a non-contractual procedure which will be reviewed every three years or earlier if legislation dictates.

Agenda Item 12 – Draft Dignity at Work Policy

Royston Town Council Dignity at Work Policy Approved by Full Council 12th September 2022 Minute number XX/23 Review date - September 2024

Introduction

All staff should be able to work in an environment free from harassment and bullying and be treated with dignity and respect regardless of gender, sexual orientation, transgender status, marital or family status, colour, race, nationality, ethnic or national origins, creed, culture, religion or belief, age, or disability.

This policy and procedure provide guidance on what to do if you are concerned about bullying or harassment and what to expect if you raise concerns. It applies to all staff (whether permanent, fixed term, or casual), contractors and agency staff. It should be read in conjunction with the council's policies on Equality and Diversity, Grievance and Discipline. The council will issue this policy to all employees as part of their induction and to all existing staff upon adoption.

Policy

Royston Town Council does not tolerate bullying or harassment in the workplace. This is the case for work-related events that take place within or outside of normal working hours; on council property or elsewhere; whether the conduct is a one-off act or repeated course of conduct, and whether done purposefully or not.

The Council does not tolerate retaliation against, or victimisation of, any person involved in bringing a complaint of harassment or bullying. Retaliation or victimisation will also constitute a disciplinary offence, which may in appropriate circumstances lead to dismissal. You should also be aware that if a court or tribunal finds that you have bullied or harassed someone, in some circumstances the treatment may amount to a crime punishable by a fine or imprisonment.

The Council will take appropriate action if any of our staff are bullied or harassed by staff, councillors, members of the public or suppliers.

What type of treatment amounts to bullying or harassment?

Bullying is offensive, intimidating, threatening, malicious or insulting behaviour, and/or an abuse or misuse of power that undermines, humiliates or injures the person on the receiving end.

Harassment is unwanted conduct related to relevant 'protected characteristics', which are sex, gender reassignment, race (which includes colour, nationality and ethnic or national origins), disability, sexual orientation, religion or belief and age. Harassment amounts to unlawful discrimination if it relates to a 'protected characteristic'.

Examples of bullying and harassment include:

- Verbal abuse or offensive comments, jokes or pranks related to age, disability, gender re-assignment, marriage, civil partnership, pregnancy, maternity, race, religion, belief, sex or sexual orientation
- Lewd or suggestive comments
- Deliberate exclusion from conversations or work activities

- Withholding information, a person needs in order to do their job
- Practical jokes, initiation ceremonies or inappropriate birthday rituals
- Physical abuse such as hitting, pushing or jostling
- Rifling through, hiding or damaging personal property
- Subjecting a person to humiliation or ridicule, belittling their efforts, often in front of others
- Abusing a position of power

It is important to recognise that conduct which one person may find acceptable, another may find totally unacceptable. All employees must, therefore, treat their colleagues with respect and appropriate sensitivity.

Bullying does not include appropriate criticism of an employee's behaviour or proper performance management.

Reporting concerns

What you should do if you witness an incident you believe to be harassment or bullying

If you witness such behaviour you should report the incident in confidence to the Town Clerk or Assistant Town Clerk. Such reports will be taken seriously and will be treated in strict confidence as far as it is possible to do so.

What you should do if you feel you are being Bullied or Harassed by a member of the public or supplier (as opposed to a colleague)

If you are being bullied or harassed by someone with whom you come into contact at work, please raise this with the Town Clerk or Assistant Town Clerk in the first instance. They will then decide how best to deal with the situation, in consultation with you.

What you should do if you feel you are being Bullied or Harassed by a councillor

If you are being bullied or harassed by a councillor, please raise this with the Town Clerk, Assistant Town Clerk or the Chair of the Council in the first instance. They will then decide how best to deal with the situation, in consultation with you. There are two possible avenues for you, informal or formal. The Informal Resolution is described below. Formal concerns regarding potential Code of Conduct breaches will be investigated by the Monitoring Officer.

What you should do if you are being Bullied or Harassed by another member of staff

If you are being bullied or harassed by a colleague or contractor, there are two possible avenues for you, informal or formal. These are described below.

Informal resolution

If you are being bullied or harassed you may be able to resolve the situation yourself by explaining clearly to the perpetrator(s) that their behaviour is unacceptable, contrary to our policy and must stop. Alternatively, you may wish to ask the Town Clerk, a colleague or another councillor to put this on your behalf or to be with you when confronting the perpetrator(s).

If the above approach does not work or if you do not want to try to resolve the situation in this way, or if you are being bullied by your own manager, you should raise the issue with the Town Clerk or Assistant Town Clerk or the Chair of the Council. They will discuss with you the option of trying to resolve the situation informally by:

- Telling the alleged perpetrator(s), without prejudging the matter, that there has been a complaint that their behaviour is having an adverse effect on a member of staff;
- That such behaviour is contrary to our policy;
- That for employees, the continuation of such behaviour could amount to a serious disciplinary offence.

It may be possible to have the conversation with the alleged perpetrator without revealing your name, if this is what you want. They will also stress that the conversation is confidential.

In certain circumstances we may be able to involve a neutral third party to facilitate a resolution of the problem. This will be discussed with you if it is appropriate.

If your complaint is resolved informally, the alleged perpetrator(s) will not usually be subject to disciplinary sanctions. However, in exceptional circumstances (such as a serious allegation of harassment or in cases where a problem has happened before) the council may decide to investigate further and take more formal action notwithstanding that you raised the matter informally. We will consult with you before taking this step.

Raising a formal complaint

If informal resolution is unsuccessful or inappropriate, you can make a formal complaint about the harassment or bullying to the Town Clerk, Assistant Town Clerk or Chair of the Council. A formal complaint may ultimately lead to disciplinary action against the perpetrator(s) where they are employed.

Someone will be appointed to investigate your complaint. You will need to co-operate with the investigation and provide the following details (if not already provided):

- The name of the alleged perpetrator(s),
- The nature of the harassment or bullying,
- The dates and times the harassment or bullying occurred
- The names of any witnesses and
- Any action taken by you to resolve the matter informally

Against a colleague or contractor

The alleged perpetrator(s) would need to be told your name and the details of your complaint for the issue to be investigated properly. However, we will carry out the investigation as confidentially and sensitively as possible. Where you and the alleged perpetrator(s) work in proximity to each other, we will consider whether it is appropriate to separate you whilst the matter is being investigated.

Against a member of the public or supplier

We will investigate the complaint as far as possible by contacting the member of public or the supplier's employer and asking for a response to the allegations.

Against a councillor

Formal concerns regarding potential breaches of the Code of Conduct will be investigated by the Monitoring Officer.

During the investigation

Investigations will be carried out promptly, sensitively and, as far as possible, confidentially. If, after an investigation, we decide that an employee has harassed or bullied another

employee, then the employee may be subject to disciplinary action, up to and including dismissal.

The Council will consider how to protect your health and wellbeing whilst the investigation is taking place and discuss this with you. Depending on the nature of the allegations, the Investigator may want to meet with you to better understand your complaint. Whilst there is no Statutory right to be accompanied at investigation meetings, the Investigator will consider your request if you want to have a work colleague or union representative with you at that meeting.

Hearing

After the investigation, a panel will meet with you in a Grievance Hearing (following the Grievance Procedure) to consider the complaint and the findings of the investigation. At the meeting you may be accompanied by a fellow worker or a trade union official.

After the meeting the panel will write to you to inform you of the decision and to notify you of your right to appeal if you are dissatisfied with the outcome. You should put your appeal in writing explaining the reasons why you are dissatisfied with the decision. Your appeal will be heard under the appeal process that is described in the Grievance Procedure.

Victimisation

Employees and others who make allegations of bullying or harassment in good faith will not be treated less favourably as a result.

False allegations

False accusations of harassment or bullying can have a serious effect on innocent individuals. Staff and others have a responsibility not to make false allegations. False allegations made in bad faith will be dealt with under our disciplinary procedure.

Disclosure and confidentiality

We will treat personal data collected during this process in accordance with the data protection policy. Information about how data is used and the basis for processing data is provided in the privacy notice.

Use of the disciplinary procedure

Harassment and bullying constitute serious misconduct. If, at any stage from the point at which a complaint is raised, we believe there is a case to answer and a disciplinary offence might have been committed, we will instigate our disciplinary procedure. Any employee found to have harassed or bullied a colleague will be liable to disciplinary action up to and including summary dismissal. This is a non-contractual procedure which will be reviewed every two years, or earlier if legislation dictates.

Agenda Item 13 – Draft Whistleblowing policy

Royston Town Council Whistleblowing Policy Approved by Full Council – 12th September 2022 Minute number XX/23 Review date - September 2025

It is important that any fraud, misconduct or wrongdoing by staff, councillors or others working on behalf of the 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 council. This policy sets out the way in which individuals may raise any concerns that they have and how those concerns will be dealt with.

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 in 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 you to have proof that such an act is being, has been, or is likely to be, committed - a reasonable belief is sufficient. You have no responsibility for investigating the matter - it is the council's responsibility to ensure that an investigation takes place.

If you make a protected disclosure you have the right not to be dismissed, subjected to any other detriment, or victimised, because you have made a disclosure. We encourage you to raise your concerns under this procedure in the first instance.

Principles

- Everyone should be aware of the importance of preventing and eliminating wrongdoing at work. Staff and others working on behalf of the 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 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 as a result 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, Assistant Town Clerk or the Chair of the Council.

Procedures

If you believe a Councillor has breached the councillor Code of Conduct, then raise it with the Town Clerk, Assistant Town Clerk or the Chair of the Council.

Concerns relating to an alleged breach of the councillor Code of Conduct will be referred to the Monitoring Officer for investigation.

The following procedure is for breaches by staff or others working for the council:

Stage 1

In the first instance, any concerns should be raised with the Town Clerk or Assistant Town Clerk, who will arrange an investigation of the matter. The investigation may involve you and other individuals involved giving a written statement. Any investigation will be carried out in accordance with the principles set out above. Your statement will be taken into account, and you will be asked to comment on any additional evidence obtained.

The Clerk (or Assistant) will take any necessary action, including reporting the matter to the Council, or any appropriate government department or regulatory agency. The Clerk (or Assistant) will also invoke any disciplinary action if required. On conclusion of any investigation, insofar as confidentiality allows, you will be told the outcome and what the council has done, or proposes to do, about it. If no action is to be taken, the reason for this will be explained.

Stage 2

If you are concerned that the Clerk or Assistant Town Clerk are involved in the wrongdoing, have failed to make a proper investigation or have failed to report the outcome of the investigations to the relevant person, you should escalate the matter to the Chair of the Council. The Chair will arrange for a review of the investigation to be carried out.

Stage 3

If on conclusion of stages 1 and 2 you reasonably believe that the appropriate action has not been taken, you should report the matter to the relevant body. This includes:

- HM Revenue & Customs
- The Health and Safety Executive
- The Environment Agency
- The Serious Fraud Office
- The Charity Commission
- The Pensions Regulator
- The Information Commissioner

You can find the full list in The Public Interest Disclosure (Prescribed Persons) Order 2014: www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/496899/BIS-16-79-blowing-the-whistle-to-a-prescribed-person.pdf

Data protection

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

This is a non-contractual procedure which will be reviewed every three years, or earlier if legislation dictates.

Agenda Item 15 – Councillor Equipment

Background

Minute 81/23 -

Members RESOLVED to approve the amended proposal to instruct officers to investigate possibilities for provision of equipment to all councillors who require it and do not have access to it.

It was noted that councillors mainly use their devices to read papers and therefore a relatively cheap solution should be possible.

6 Councillors have requested a device.

Councillors will use their devices to –

- Read and respond to emails
- Read council papers
- Attend Zoom meetings
- Prepare or edit basic documents
- Access papers during council meetings

Due to taxation issues including the reclaim of VAT and the avoidance of benefit in kind, the devices will need to be purchased by the council, ownership will remain with the council and devices will be lent to councillors to use during their term of office. A device usage policy will be drafted for adoption by the council. Councillors must hand their devices back to the council when their term of office ends.

Each device will be set up by officers and will include a new Google account linked to the councillor's email address, a shortcut so that Webmail can be accessed from the desktop once signed in and training and support will be provided where necessary.

Options researched:

Chromebooks

LENOVO IdeaPad 3i 14" Chromebook - Intel® Celeron®, 64 GB eMMC, Grey

Curry's - £149.00 (£124.17 excluding VAT)

4 USB ports so you can connect a phone or other accessories easily.

Battery life is approximately 10 hours.

Virus protection included.

Total costs - £745.02

Acer Chromebook 311 4GB 32GB SSD 11.6 Inch Google Chrome OS - Silver

Laptops Direct - £149.97 (£124.98 excluding VAT)

2 USB ports.

A slightly smaller device.

Battery life 10 hours.

Virus protection included.

Total costs - £749.88

Laptops

ASUS E210MA 11.6" Laptop - Intel® Celeron®, 64 GB eMMC

Curry's - £149.00 (£124.17 excluding VAT)

- Windows 11 S - This version allows only apps from Microsoft Store, and requires Microsoft Edge for safe browsing.
- Intel® Celeron® N4020 Processor
- RAM: 4 GB / Storage: 64 GB eMMC
- 1 year subscription to Microsoft 365
- 2 USB ports + 1 HDMI and 1 audio jack socket

Very basic – light use only, entry level. Likely to be very slow as Microsoft 365 needs more processing power.

Battery life up to 12 hours.

Total costs – Laptops - £745.02

Virus protection - £120 to £180 per year

Microsoft Office - £324 per year after year 1

HP 15s-fq2015na Laptop - Core™ i3

HP Store - £379.99 (£316.66 excluding VAT)

- Windows 11 Home
- Intel® Core™ i3 1115G4 (11th Generation)
- 8 GB RAM
- 256 GB SSD
- 39.6 cm (15.6 "), FHD (1920 x 1080), 250 nits, 45% NTSC
- Intel® UHD Graphics
- 3 USB ports, 1 HDMI and 1 audio jack socket

Reasonable all round laptop

Battery life shorter than a Chromebook – up to 7.5 hours.

Total costs – Laptops - £1899.96

Virus protection - £120 to £180 per year

Microsoft Office - £324 per year

(Microsoft Office basic business user costs £54 per year, per user. Anti-virus security between £20 and £30 per year per device.)

Officer recommendation: Lenovo IdeaPad 3i as above.

Very easy to use. Can work offline and create/edit documents then save changes when back online.

Everything saved in Google drive therefore no licences required.

All apps come from Playstore or Google Web Apps store.

Can view and make simple edits to Microsoft documents including Excel.

Can use Zoom, Teams or Skype once app is downloaded and can share files easily with Android phone.

Battery life much better than with the more expensive laptop. Lighter, faster and more secure than cheap laptop. No need to download extra security/virus protection.

Councillor email will be used to set up Google account, no need for Gmail. When finished with Chromebook, any documents will still be available on One Drive.

Document creation is via Google Docs, which you can then share. This is quite easy to do and training can be given.

Documents created in Word and received via email can be downloaded, edited then sent back as attachment to email.

All council rooms have WiFi so documents can be accessed during meetings.

One of these devices was recently purchase for officer use and all of the requirements have been tested using that device and so it has been confirmed that it is sufficient for carrying out the required tasks.

Total costs: 6 x Lenovo Chromebooks - £745.02

Members are to resolve to purchase 6 Chromebooks from the recommended supplier.

Agenda Item 15b – Draft Information & Technology (IT) Usage & Security Policy for Councillors

Royston Town Council
Information & Technology (IT) Usage & Security Policy for Councillors
Approved by Full Council 12th September 2022 Minute number: XX/22
Review date: September 2025

1. Policy Statement:

1.1 To ensure compliance with all relevant legislation and standards in relation to data protection, information security and compliance monitoring, the Council has adopted an Information Technology (IT) Usage & Security policy for Councillors which should be read in conjunction with its Code of Conduct, Social Media and Data Protection policies.

1.2 Any Member that is supplied with IT equipment by Royston Town Council must use such equipment in keeping with this policy.

2. Objectives

The Council makes use of IT systems, for data storage, communications and as a source of information. This policy is intended to:

- prevent inappropriate use of computer equipment, such as personal use or accessing and circulating inappropriate material;
- protect confidential, personal or commercially sensitive data;
- protect the Council from the risk of financial loss, loss of reputation or libel;
- ensure that the facilities are not used so as to cause harm or damage to any person or organisation;
- ensure that Council property is properly looked after; and
- monitor the use of computer facilities to ensure compliance with internal policies and rules and to detect abuse.

3. Acceptable Use:

3.1 Members may borrow a Chromebook from the Council to enable them to undertake activities which are consistent with Councillors' roles and responsibilities. Personal use of the equipment is not permitted.

3.2 Members are the only persons authorised to use the equipment and software issued to them. The equipment must not be used by colleagues, friends and family.

3.3 Members may use the equipment at council meetings but avoid using it in public places.

4. Email (internal and external):

4.1 Your email inbox should be checked on a regular basis.

4.2 It is essential that Members exclusively use the separate roystontowncouncil.gov.uk email address provided, for Town Council business.

4.3 Internet email is not a secure medium of communication; it can be intercepted and read. Do not use it to say anything you would not wish to be made public.

4.4 If you are sending confidential information by email this should be sent using password protected attachments where possible.

4.5 Email should be treated as any other documentation and retained according to the council's policies.

4.6 Do not forward email messages unless the original sender is aware that the message may be forwarded. If you would not have forwarded a copy of a paper memo with the same information do not forward the email.

5. Data Protection:

5.1 Members are reminded that any e-mail sent or received in their capacity as a Town Councillor is Council data and any e-mails may have to be disclosed following requests under the Data Protection Act or Freedom of Information Act. For this reason, personal use of the Council's computing and network facilities cannot be deemed to be private.

5.2 Any breaches or suspected security incidents concerning Council data or computing devices must be reported immediately to the Town Clerk who is the Data Controller.

6. Security:

6.1 All council devices should be password protected to prevent unauthorised access. Passwords must not be divulged or written down anywhere an unauthorised person could find it or other authentication. Change your password immediately if you believe its confidentiality may have been compromised.

6.2 Members should only use device on password protected Wi-Fi. Home Wi-Fi networks must be encrypted.

6.3 Always log off/screen lock the device whenever it is left for more than a moment.

6.4 No additional software can be uploaded without the express permission of the Town Clerk/Deputy Town Clerk.

7. Responsibility for Equipment:

7.1 A record of all equipment loaned to each Member that requests such equipment will be kept by the Town Clerk.

7.2 All hardware and software issued to Members remains the property of the Town Council.

7.3 Members are responsible for all equipment until they return it and must ensure it is kept secure at all times.

7.4 If any mechanical, electronic, or software defects or malfunctions are found, Members should immediately report these to the attention of office staff who will arrange repairs.

7.5 Any damage caused to any IT equipment and negligent use of the software supplied by Royston Town Council must be reported immediately to office staff who will organise repairs which will be paid for by the Member.

7.6 When any Member ceases to be a member of Royston Town Council they must return all items of IT equipment back to the Council in good working condition.

8. Monitoring:

8.1 The Council may monitor IT usage periodically in order to:

- ensure compliance with this policy
- check the physical condition of the device
- ensure compliance by users with all applicable laws (including data protection), regulations and guidelines published and in force from time to time

9. Policy Review:

September 2025, or earlier if legislation dictates.

Agenda Item 16 - Proposed Inflationary Parking Tariff Increases 2022/23:

The following email was received from the Strategic Infrastructure & Projects Manager at North Herts Council –

“You may recall that we last consulted you in February 2021 with respect to our proposed tariff increases for 2021/22, which were implemented in October 2021. The last tariff increase included inflationary increases to:

- the 2, 3 & 4+ hour tariff bands with increases being rounded to the nearest 5p across all car parks
- a nominal increase in the after 3pm tariff band in all Hitchin Car Parks,
- an increase in season tickets for all long stay car parks, and
- an increase in business permits in the car park at Knebworth.

The one hour tariff bands remained untouched across all car parks in all four towns and Knebworth, these remained at the 2019/20 prices.

It was agreed that in order to enable local businesses to recover from the pandemic that the Council would delay the inflationary tariff increases for 2022/23 until later this year. In accordance with the Council’s Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) we are currently working towards proposals for implementation during the latter part of 2022/2023 and into 2023/24 (i.e. from October 2023 to Sept 2024) which will include a proposed inflationary tariff increase of 2%. Transaction data has been analysed to estimate the impact of adjusting individual tariffs.

We are therefore proposing to:

- Achieve most of the inflationary target through applying a 10p increase to the one hour tariff bands across all off-street car parks in Hitchin, Letchworth, Royston and Knebworth. (with the exception of Baldock, as Baldock only has a 3hr and all day tariff band).
This is estimated to increase overall parking revenue by only slightly less than 1.9% based on the current composition of demand for each tariff. This estimate however does not consider any consequent positive impact on the demand for the 2 hour tariff from this option, the relative value of which would increase.
- Retain all other tariff bands as per the current 2021/22 prices across all car parks.
- Not to increase the cost of Season Tickets or Business Permits as there has been a reduction in the take up of these permits given the change in employer habits with more people continuing to work from home and commuting into their office on certain days. The Council will continue to monitor the uptake over the coming year and may consider reviewing its approach going forward.
- Retain the off-peak incentives after 3pm in Hitchin and Royston, where the after 3pm tariff 1 hour bands in the Hitchin Car parks will increase by 10p in accordance with the 1st bullet point, and the subsidised full ‘free after 3pm’ policy in all Royston car parks will be retained. However the Council will be looking to introduce the requirement for visitors to take a ticket and display it for any subsidised parking session. This will enable the Council to monitor usage and agree the subsidy rate accordingly.
- Introduce a tariff (to be agreed) for vehicles using Electric Vehicle (EV) charging bays within the Council car parks. The same tariff would be applied to all EV bays. Disabled Blue Badge holders will be exempt, as they are currently exempt from paying for parking sessions across all car parks. This is an incentive to encourage blue badge holders to park in our car parks than on street.

These proposals would be applied to all NHC car parks in Hitchin, Letchworth Garden City, Royston and Knebworth and are shown in the [attached Table at Appendix 1](#).

Car Park		Duration / hours	2021/22 Current Tariff Prices	2022/2023 Tariff Prices including proposed increases
Priory Gardens	Standard tariffs	1	£0.60	£0.70
		2	£1.55	£1.55
		3	£3.85	£3.85
	Post 3pm Tariffs	1	£0.00	£0.00
		2	£0.00	£0.00
		3	£0.00	£0.00
The Warren	Standard tariffs	1	£0.60	£0.70
		2	£1.35	£1.35
		3	£1.85	£1.85
		3+	£3.95	£3.95
	Post 3pm Tariffs	1	£0.00	£0.00
		2	£0.00	£0.00
		3	£0.00	£0.00

Table 6 Season Tickets

All Long Stay Car Parks	2021/22 Current Season Ticket Prices	2022/23 Prices
1 month	£87.00	£87.00
3 months	£215.00	£215.00
6 months	£399.00	£399.00
12 months	£740.00	£740.00

More information can be found in the North Herts Council Cabinet Report – “Agenda Item 13 on Proposed Increase in Parking Tariffs” at the following link -

[Agenda for Cabinet on Tuesday, 13th September, 2022, 7.30 pm | North Herts Council \(north-herts.gov.uk\)](#)

Members are to formulate a response to the proposed increased car parking charges in Royston.

Agenda Item 17 – Smaller Authorities Audit Appointments

Option to opt out of the SAAA central external auditor appointment arrangements

Under the Local Audit (Smaller Authorities) Regulations 2015, SAAA is responsible for appointing external auditors to all applicable opted-in smaller authorities, for setting the terms of appointment for limited assurance reviews and for managing the contracts with the appointed audit firms. Smaller authorities are those whose gross annual income or expenditure is less than £6.5 million.

The next 5-year appointing period runs from 2022-23 until 2026-27 and SAAA has undertaken a procurement exercise to appoint auditors to each County area from 1 April 2022. Now that the submission deadline for the 2021-22 Annual Governance and Accountability Returns has passed, the option to opt-out of the next round of 5-year audit appointments has arrived.

All authorities require an appointed external auditor even if the authority meets the criteria to qualify for exemption, as a Certificate of Exemption is required to be submitted to the external auditor and the auditor must be in place in case of objections from local electors.

During the previous 5-year period **all** smaller authorities were 'opted-in' to the central procurement regime managed by SAAA - no authority decided to 'opt-out' and follow the various complex procedures required under statute to appoint their own external auditor.

However, all authorities must be given the option to opt-out of the central procurement and appointment scheme and appoint their own external auditor for the next 5-year period, although the process is onerous for smaller authorities.

Any authorities who do not wish to be part of the SAAA arrangements must formally notify SAAA that they wish to opt out no later than 28th October 2022.

Opting-out

Opting out is a significant decision which requires careful consideration; An authority that wishes to opt out must formally reach and record that decision in a way that meets the requirements of its own governance framework by convening a full council meeting.

Key implications are:

- an opted-out authority regardless of size **must** appoint an appropriate external auditor;
- the appointed auditor **must** be a registered auditor as defined by the Companies Act and a member of Institute of Chartered Accountants (England and Wales).
- an opted-out authority **must** convene an appropriate independent auditor panel which meets the requirements of the Local Audit and Accountability Act 2014 (LAAA).
- an opted-out authority will need to develop its own specification for its external audit contract, will need to negotiate the price for this work on an individual basis and will need to manage the contract, including any disputes, and any independence issues that arise;
- an opted-out authority must ensure full compliance with the relevant requirements of the Local Audit and Accountability Act and supporting Regulations;
- any opted-out authority that does not successfully appoint an appropriate external auditor and notify SAAA who their external auditor is by 30th November 2022 will have an external auditor appointed for it by the Secretary of State through SAAA. This will result in additional costs.

Members of Royston Town Council are to RESOLVE to remain opted-in to the SAAA central external auditor appointment arrangements for 2022-2027.

Agenda Item 19 – Solar Together Scheme

An email has been received from North Herts Council –

“Do you have a building that could benefit from solar panels? Solar can be a smart investment, allowing you to save on your energy bills and to generate your own clean electricity.

We’ve been working with the [Hertfordshire Climate Change and Sustainability Partnership \(HCCSP\)](#) to launch Solar Together across Hertfordshire.

Solar Together is a solar group-buy scheme run by iChoosr in conjunction with local authorities. The scheme has run successfully in Suffolk and Cambridgeshire amongst other counties, and is currently running in Bedfordshire.

The scheme is aiming to offer installation of solar panels (and/or battery storage if wanted) at a competitive price. It works by grouping together people from across the county who are interested in generating their own renewable energy, and then acting as an intermediary for them to increase their bargaining power.

It’s free to register your interest and you are under no obligation to proceed if the price and recommendation do not meet your expectations. Each offer consists of a complete system including a survey, installation, monitoring and warranties.

Solar Together pre-vets all their installers to ensure you’ll receive a high-quality service from a certified provider.

Timeline: You have until the 27th September to express your interest. You should then receive a recommendation from around mid-October. You will have five weeks from when you receive this to decide whether or not to accept the offer. All installations are planned to be complete by six months from the point of acceptance.”

More information can be found on the North Herts website - <https://www.north-herts.gov.uk/solar-together>

Members are to decide whether to register an interest in the scheme for the Town Council’s properties at the Town Hall and Market Hill Rooms.

If agreed, further information and quotes will be discussed further at the next Full Council meeting.