

Governance and Accountability Framework and Ethical Standards

It is very important that Helmdon Parish Council (HPC) maintains the highest standards of governance and accountability as a council, and that individual councillors maintain the highest ethical standards. It is important because HPC is a tax-raising and tax-spending local authority and the taxpayers of Helmdon have a reasonable expectation that the council will spend their money wisely and that their elected representatives will behave properly.

The council makes an Annual Governance Statement each May as part of the Annual Governance and Accountability Return (AGAR). The council is required to say “Yes” or “No” to each of eight statements (Statement 9 does not apply to HPC). All the Annual Governance Statements for the past decade are at <https://helmdonparishcouncil.gov.uk/annual-governance-statements>.

All councillors are bound by HPC’s Code of Conduct (<https://helmdonparishcouncil.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/2025/01/HPC-Code-of-Conduct-Jan-2025.pdf>), which requires councillors to act in accordance with the Nolan Principles: Selflessness, Integrity, Objectivity, Accountability, Openness, Honesty, and Leadership. The Nolan Principle of Leadership requires that “*Holders of public office should exhibit these principles in their own behaviour and treat others with respect. They should actively promote and robustly support the principles and challenge poor behaviour wherever it occurs.*”

If things go wrong, members of the public have recourse via HPC’s complaints procedure, if it is to do with the council’s governance and accountability, and via the standards complaints procedure, if it is to do with the ethical behaviour of a councillor.

Councillors do not usually use the complaints procedure if they had a question or concern about the council’s governance and accountability. Instead, they would normally raise the matter with the clerk in their first instance, or with the chair if the concern was about something the clerk had done or not done. The matter would then be addressed by the clerk, council, or relevant committee as appropriate.

HPC receives very few complaints and usually receives a clean bill of health from the external auditor each year. The council has, and has had for the past twenty years, very high standards of governance and accountability. It operates with complete openness and transparency (anything that can or should be published is on the council’s website. Confidential information, such as that relating to the clerk’s employment, are not published for obvious reasons).

The council meeting to be held on 22 October 2025 provides a timely opportunity for any councillor to raise, openly and in public, any questions or concerns they have about the council’s governance and accountability. The council will then have the opportunity to address those questions or concerns. If none are raised at the meeting, the council can continue under the reasonable assumption that there are no questions or concerns at this time.

It is very important that councillors distinguish between concerns with something that the council has done or has not done, and concerns relating to the ethical behaviour of a fellow councillor. Where a councillor has a concern about the ethical behaviour of a fellow councillor, they should normally speak to the councillor concerned because all councillors, under the Nolan Principle of Leadership have a legal duty to challenge poor behaviour wherever it occurs. A councillor may proceed directly to making a standards complaint if they cannot or will not speak to the subject councillor first. However, councillors should be aware that making a standards complaint against a fellow councillor is a very serious matter,

particularly if the complaint is of a criminal breach of HPC's Code, such as something relating to the subject councillor's employment, trade, or profession. Councillors should remember that they are legally required to refrain from making trivial or malicious allegations against others.

General Obligations

Councillors must not bully or intimidate any person. Bullying is defined as: "offensive, intimidating, malicious or insulting behaviour, an abuse or misuse of power through means that undermine, humiliate, denigrate, or injure the recipient". Examples of bullying include, but are not limited to:

- Spreading malicious rumours or insulting someone by word or behaviour
- Copying communications that are critical about someone to others who do not need to know
- Ridiculing or demeaning someone – picking on them or setting them up to fail
- Exclusion or victimization
- Unfair treatment
- Overbearing supervision or other misuse of power or position
- Unwelcome sexual advances – touching, standing too close, display of offensive materials, asking for sexual favours, making decisions on the basis of sexual advances being accepted or rejected
- Making threats or comments about job security without foundation
- Deliberately undermining a competent worker by overloading and constant criticism
- Preventing individuals progressing by intentionally blocking promotion or training opportunities

Corporate governance

The council operates as a body corporate. It is unlawful for the council to delegate a function to an individual councillor. No councillor, not even the chair, is legally entitled to commit the resources of the council or make binding decisions for the council. Councillors appointed to representative roles should act only in accordance with their role description, they should keep the clerk informed of their activities and correspondence, and they should bring all recommendations for action back to the council or one of its committees as appropriate for decision.

Once the council (or a committee) has made a decision at a lawfully convened meeting, all councillors have corporate responsibility for that decision, regardless of whether they voted for or against. It is unethical and brings the council into disrepute (which is a breach of the Code of Conduct) for a councillor to go against the decisions of the council, to act contrary to the decisions of the council, or to talk negatively about the council and its decisions.

A good council has a good chair, a good clerk, and a good team of councillors all pulling together in the same, agreed, direction. Helmdon Parish Council will be most efficient and effective when its councillors and officers work together as a team, treating each other with civility and respect.