



Uppingham Town Council Governance Health Check

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LGRC Associates Ltd

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1. Executive Summary

LGRC Associates Ltd were commissioned by Uppingham Town Council (UTC) in November 2016 to undertake a governance health check, which covered 6 governance principles based on and adapted from the good governance standard for public services published by the Independent Commission on Good Governance in Public Services. The review was also based on legislative requirements and good practice.

During two visits in November 2016 and subsequent research ahead of and after the visits, appropriate information was gathered to undertake the review.

UTC has many systems and policies in place which are good practice, adequate and appropriate for good performance in terms of governance. There is a good level of awareness of the need to keep policies up to date, particularly with the many legislation changes that the sector faces. Whilst UTC provides members with an information folder upon appointment, it is aware that it currently lacks policies and procedures where employees are concerned and this area needs to be improved upon for UTC to fulfil its responsibility as a competent employer.

Many of the policies and systems that UTC have in place simply need slight tweaking to bring them fully up to date and to meet the principles of good governance. For example, there is a thorough Financial Risk Management document in place but UTC's Financial Regulations require review to ensure compliance with the Public Contracts Regulations 2015 as the current UTC document was last reviewed in 2014.

The agendas for Council and Committee meetings are in accordance with the legislation in all aspects and draft minutes are published within two to three days of the last meeting. An attempt to improve partnership working with varying organisations within Uppingham appeared to be one of the main reasons for commissioning this Review, particularly as it is at times unclear how members' interests sit when they are representing various organisations, including UTC.

Whilst it has been possible to identify a number of recommendations as to how UTC operates in terms of good governance and performance, this does not detract from the view that UTC currently operates to a good standard of governance and performance with appropriate policies and procedures in place. The recommendations will simply strengthen and enhance UTC's role as a council that operates to, and within, a higher standard of governance and performance.



2. Introduction

2.1 Governance Principles

The governance health check and performance review is based on the following principles which are adapted from the good governance standard for public services published by the Independent Commission on Good Governance in Public Services:

- a. The Council has a clearly defined purpose, and aims and objectives that are clear and understandable, that have been communicated clearly to the public;
- b. The Council is performing effectively with clear leadership and the Council, Councillors and staff understand their role, statutory duties and powers;
- c. The Council has appropriate policies in place to show that it has standards, values and a code of conduct for members and staff;
- d. The Council's decision making is clear, informed, understandable, transparent and risks are managed with an effective risk management system in place;
- e. The Council develops and continually improves members and staff performance so they have the capacity to and the capability of working effectively in their roles;
- f. The Council engages with its community, empowers them to be involved in the decision making process and has a clearly defined community engagement policy and communicates effectively.

The health check and review expanded the above principles to also include legislative requirements and good practice, and covered a number of governance areas, including; constitutional, operational, financial, risk management, community interaction and human resources. Within each of the governance areas, a number of documents and processes were examined against a set criterion to test each of the above principles.

2.2 Background

Uppingham is a rural market town in the county of Rutland in the East Midlands. The town has a population of approximately 4,745 (2011 census), the UTC budget for 2016/2017 is £112,707 putting UTC in the medium local council bracket, the budget includes a precept of £105,393 and it has a band D council tax rate of £70.38.

UTC has 15 councillors, it does not appoint a Leader, and has a Mayor and Deputy Mayor. The Mayor has ex-officio appointments on all committees, additional details on the committees are included in the report. 3 members of staff are led by the Town Clerk, Mr Neil Wedge, who has recently obtained the Certificate in Local Council Administration (CiLCA). The staffing structure requires a thorough review to ensure that UTC is operating to maximum efficiency as currently the Town Clerk has very little additional resource and this leaves UTC vulnerable in the case of absence.

The Council recently acquired the general power of competence in November 2016, and provides a significant number of services and facilities, including allotments,



public conveniences, cemeteries, open spaces, play areas, a weekly charter market, a Town Hall, street lighting and a heritage trail. UTC are also responsible for administering a charity and are involved in a number of projects, including a neighbourhood plan, and partnership working with varying other community organisations that can lead to some confusion with the electorate in relation to defined responsibilities.

2.3 The Governance Health Check & Performance Review

The Health Check and Review was started during an initial visit to UTC offices on Thursday 17 November 2016, and a subsequent visit on Friday 25 November 2016. This report includes the findings from both visits and subsequent research and review of the UTC website and documents provided.

The report offers recommendations under each area as appropriate.



3. Governance Area – Constitutional

3.1 Standing Orders (SOs)

The latest version was updated in August 2016, and was reviewed against the National Association of Local Councils (NALC) model set published in the Local Councils Explained publication in October 2013. UTC has a very thorough section within its SOs that complies with the amendments introduced by The Openness of Local Government Bodies Regulations in 2014 to allow the filming, photographing or audio-recording of a meeting.

All members are given a copy of SOs following election or co-option, and kept updated with any amendments or changes. Officers who require a copy for their role are given a copy and made aware of SOs. Upon checking a sample of minutes and agendas, there is no reason or evidence to suggest that SOs are not adhered to.

Recommendation: SO 2.18.0 Financial controls & procurement needs to be amended to ensure compliance with the Public Contracts Regulations 2015, which impose detailed statutory obligations on councils when procuring and awarding contracts with an estimated value of £25,000 or more (LTN 87: Procurement, January 2016).

Recommendation: The implications for Sub Committee meetings should be considered for mention within SO 2.3.0 Meetings Generally.

Recommendation: The quorum at SO 2.3.21 should look to increase from four to five i.e. one-third of the Council.

Recommendation: Reference to 'SO 9' within SO 2.7.1 should be amended to read 'SO 2.9.0'.

Recommendation: There are older versions of UTC's SOs available on its website and consideration should be given to removing these previous versions.

Recommendation: That SOs are reviewed at least every two years and additionally as soon as possible when legislation changes which would amend the orders.

3.2 Scheme of Delegation

A scheme is in place and was agreed by council on 2 November 2016. It details the delegation to committees and appropriate staff are aware of the policy and any limitations. It was noted that the Neighbourhood Plan is in its infancy and in the process of evolution.

Recommendation: That a resolution list be compiled for regular distribution to members that highlights the recording of all Council and delegated Committee decisions.

3.3 Ethical Framework

A code of conduct for members, in accordance with the localism act, was agreed by council on 4 July 2012 and all members have been given a copy and training on the code was offered to all members. A dispensation policy is in place and referenced



within UTC's SOs. All members have completed a register of members' interests form which is published on UTC's website.

Recommendation: Member signatures should be redacted and consideration should be given to uploading the completed form with the signature of the Rutland County Council's Monitoring Officer, also redacted.

Recommendation: The register of members' interests form for recently co-opted Claire Crowley requires upload on UTC's website as well as an associated councillor profile.

Recommendation: A specific code of conduct for staff should be created for adoption.

3.4 Transparency Code

All expenditure over £500 is published on the UTC website under the finances section.

Recommendation: That UTC publishes on its website, on a dedicated page, the applicable information listed in the DCLG Local Government Transparency Code which was published in February 2015 and is available via this link; <http://www.local.gov.uk/practitioners-guides-to-publishing-data>

3.5 Policies, Protocols and Statements

- a. Predetermination and Bias – The Localism Act 2011, s25(2), refers to predetermination for decision-makers.

Recommendation: That a guidance note based on s25(2) of the Localism Act 2011 is issued to all members.

- b. Freedom of Information (FOI) – A publication scheme is in place and was reviewed and adopted by Council on 30 January 2016. The publication scheme includes appropriate information including details of information to be published and how it can be obtained.

- c. Complaints Policy/Procedure – This is on the UTC website and is dated 26 January 2016.

Recommendation: That the policy be reviewed during 2017 with reference to NALC legal topic note 9E dated June 2014, titled "Handling Complaints".

- d. Expenses (staff and members) – It is understood that members may claim mileage for journeys on council business outside of the town boundary and the Town Clerk may claim mileage as indicated in their individual terms and conditions. It is also understood that there is currently an allowance of £650 for the Chairman.

Recommendation: That a policy on expenses, stating the rates that apply and when they may be claimed, is raised for members and staff. This would make it clear to members, staff and the public of the council's policy on expenses.



e. Data Protection (including handling) Policy – UTC makes references to requests for information within its Standing Orders at SO 2.20.0 and includes a statement on its website titled ‘Privacy and Cookies’.

f. Emergency Plan/Crisis Management Procedure – There is no plan held by UTC.

Recommendation: That the Leicester, Leicestershire & Rutland Local Resilience Forum be contacted to establish what emergency plan exists on file for the locality of Uppingham. The plan could also be extended to include business continuity and a disaster recovery plan and linked to the risk management policy at referenced at section 6.1 below.

g. Building & Assets Management Plan – A list of all buildings and assets is being compiled but requires greater detail, see section 4.8 below.

h. Training and Development Policy for members and staff – There is not currently a policy in place.

Recommendation: That a training plan for each year is produced along with a medium term plan, for example when re-training, updating or refresher training is required.

i. Attracting members around election and by-election time – There is an upload on the UTC website via the news page titled “why be a councillor” which provided useful and appropriate information to residents interested in becoming councillors.

Recommendation: That during the 12-month period leading up to an election, articles explaining the councillor role, what it entails and how to stand is widely publicised to attract and encourage residents to stand and that the Democratic Officer at Rutland County Council be encouraged to arrange election workshops for members of the community wanting to learn more.

j. Partnership Working - UTC works in conjunction with many other organisations but there is no defined policy statement at present. There appears scope for the Uppingham Town Partnership to amalgamate its responsibility for the Town events with the Town Council as a lot of the public incorrectly view UTC as the point of information in relation to the events anyway.

There appears however to be a potential conflict of interest for some members of the Council that are attempting to represent the interests of the Town Council as well as those of other organisations and this was mentioned can on occasion affect the membership of Committees.

It was highlighted that there has been some confusion amongst the public in the past about what powers these varying organisations hold versus the powers of the Town Council and whilst this confusion has somewhat reduced, it is still there in part and requires a further attempt at clarification.



Recommendation: That UTC considers arranging a refresher training session with the Monitoring Officer at Rutland County Council where members' interests are concerned in an attempt to help clarify the decision-making process for members where these varying partnership organisations are concerned. The same opportunity could also be taken with the Monitoring Officer to review the existing list of UTC representatives on partnership organisations and the current complication of Director status where some members are concerned to refine and protect UTC and its individual members.

Recommendation: That UTC considers the implementation of a policy statement that focuses upon partnership working and the associated subject of members' interests.

Recommendation: That UTC considers including within its Annual Report (for distribution to its electorate) an article about its responsibilities as well as those of other partnership organisations to help local understanding by removing any possible confusion surrounding the perceived powers held by unofficial bodies. This article can then be consistently referred to as and when the need may arise. Further referenced at section 4.12 Annual Report.

- k. Community Engagement Policy – A community engagement statement was adopted by UTC on 3 August 2011.

Recommendation: That the community engagement strategy be reviewed in accordance with the policy statement for partnership working highlighted at 3.5(j) above.

- l. Communications Policy/Strategy – The policy was revised and adopted by Council on 29 January 2015. It covers key and important points such as social media and contact with the press and media.

- m. Recording and Photographing Council Meetings – Standing Order 2.28.0 follows legislation guidance and is appropriate, clear and understandable.

- n. Investment Policy/Statement – There is not currently an annual investment strategy in place.

Recommendation: That UTC considers implementing an investment policy that includes appropriate information regarding legislation.

- o. Document Retention Policy – A policy does not currently exist.

Recommendation: That a policy be created with reference to NALC legal topic note 40 dated November 2016, titled "Local Councils' Documents and Records".

- p. Grant Awarding Policy – There is a section for Grant Aid available within the 'What We Do' section of UTC's website.

Recommendation: That the policy be reviewed annually and consideration be given to requesting applicants to provide receipts to evidence that the money granted has been put to the purpose for which it was obtained.



- q. Bio-diversity – It is understood that UTC may have an aspiration in the near future to achieve accreditation under the Local Council Award Scheme.

Recommendation: That UTC considers producing an environmental policy to include a section on bio-diversity.

- r. Crime & Disorder – It is understood that UTC may have aspiration in the near future to achieve accreditation under the Local Council Award Scheme.

Recommendation: That UTC considers producing a statement which demonstrates knowledge of the law and includes ways of reminding councillors of the duties and examples of how they are implemented.

Many of the following policies, statement, protocols and plans might normally be found in a staff handbook but as such a handbook does not currently exist at UTC, the area of Human Resources was a recognised weakness that requires improvement:

- s. Anti-fraud, anti-bribery and corruption.
- t. Disciplinary and grievance.
- u. Whistle blowing / raising concerns including internal reporting policy.
- v. Bullying and Harassment / Dignity at Work.
- w. Absence.
- x. Health and Safety policy.
- y. Staff retention policy.
- z. Computer, email, internet and telephone use.
- aa. Member and Staff relationship policy.
- bb. Equality (2010 act).

Recommendation: That UTC looks to create an Employee Handbook that should include mention of all the above.

3.6 Powers

UTC gained the General Power of Competence (GPC) on 2 November 2016 and aims to make full use of the power as a first resort.

Recommendation: That an information sheet on the GPC, including any risks and limitations, is produced and made freely available to all members and staff.

3.7 Appointments

The Council has formally appointed a Proper Officer / Responsible Finance Officer, who has responsibility for the administration of the financial affairs, and a Chairman (Mayor).



4. Governance Area – Operational

4.1 Strategic (or Forward/Work) Plan

UTC currently produces a priority schedule that is reviewed monthly but does not yet have a comprehensive strategic plan. A strategic plan should link to revenue and capital plans with programmes, projects and services clearly defined. It should also include a business plan, a service delivery plan with financial projections and cover the work of each of the committees.

Recommendation: That UTC commences development of a 3 to 5 year strategic plan and also offers it to staff and the public for comment/feedback to create a clearly defined future vision for Uppingham that incorporates the themes already identified within the Neighbourhood Plan.

4.2 Service Agreements and Contracts

As per the recommendation at section 3.1 Standing Orders.

Recommendation: This is an area that needs strengthening to ensure compliance with the Public Contracts Regulations 2015.

4.3 Partnership Working

As per the recommendation at section 3.5(j) above.

4.4 Committees

There is a committee structure in place which appears to work well at the present time, however, UTC might wish to consider its staffing structure for improved efficiency to ensure that it continues to meet the needs and aspirations of the Council in its future work and plans. All appointments to committees are made by the Council, which also appoints the committee chairmen. Comprehensive terms of reference exist for each committee in a document dated August 2016. Standing orders define which orders apply to committees.

Recommendation: That consideration is given to the resources that UTC requires to drive the necessary activity of the Council as currently the Town Clerk has approximately 7 hours of administration support per week and this limits the potential for delegation.

4.5 Decision Making Process

From the documentation provided, the general process appears open and transparent. The reports checked included appropriate information and supporting documentation and reference to financial implications, community and environmental implications, crime and disorder implications and a very thorough assessment in an attempt to mitigate risk. It appears clear to members what they are expected to consider and decide upon and it is understood that expert professional advice is obtained where appropriate.



4.6 Members

All members are given induction training when first elected and receive regular updates and the opportunity for further training as appropriate for their role in the Council. On election, members receive an information pack that includes a copy of the good councillors guide and all appropriate policies, and enough members were elected to meet the criteria for GPC. The Chairman receives an allowance for Mayoral duties, but members do not receive a general allowance only travel expenses for any authorised travel outside of the town (see the recommendation at section 3.5 (d) above regarding expenses).

Recommendation: That the Mayor and Deputy Mayor of the Council, along with Committee Chairmen are offered the opportunity to attend Chairman's Training sessions.

Recommendation: That a skills audit is undertaken now for all members and one is also undertaken following each election or co-option of a member and any skills are utilised by the Council where possible.

Recommendation: That a copy of the 'being a good employer' guide be included within the information packs that are allocated to members upon their appointment.

Recommendation: That an attendance record for members is published on the UTC website and also included in the annual report where council meetings and committee meetings are concerned.

4.7 Staff Internal Communication System

The Town Clerk is contracted to 30 hours per week and has administration support for approximately 7 hours per week. Additionally there is a Caretaker who works 7.5 hours per week and a Parks Attendant who works for 8 hours per week. There are not any team meetings taking place where staff are updated about on-going issues and given the opportunity to feed comments back into the decision making process and raise any appropriate issues but there are weekly rotas issued. The Town Clerk has an open door policy for staff and an assurance of confidentiality. There are not perceived to be any staff morale issues. All employees are seemingly flexible and willing in attitude.

Recommendation: See the recommendation at section 4.4 above about UTC's current resources and capacity going forward.

4.8 Building and Assets Management Plan

A plan is being produced, see section 3.5(g) above. Job descriptions for employees need to be formalised to highlight the specific responsibility for buildings and assets on a day to day basis. The Town Clerk is responsible for annually reviewing the insurance for buildings and assets. Keys for buildings are listed in a key register, closely controlled and held in a fireproof lockable cabinet in the Council offices.



Recommendation: That the plan includes all buildings and assets along with their value, and a management and maintenance plan which is linked to appropriate budgetary funding.

Recommendation: That a review of all buildings and assets is carried out to ascertain that they meet the current and will meet the future needs and aspirations of the Council.

4.9 Council Performance Management System

There is not currently a system in place.

Recommendation: UTC may wish to consider introducing a performance management system if there is an aspiration to achieve the quality gold award under the Local Council Award Scheme as a requirement of that award is to show how the council manages its performance as a corporate body by way of a statement.

There is a useful document on the LGA website which could be used as a starting basis. Any results from a system should be published on both the UTC website and in the annual report:

http://www.local.gov.uk/documents/10180/7530798/L12_210+performance+mgmt+workbook+final_22210.pdf/ee67942c-67ba-456b-b6f8-9ff17e15c3e2

4.10 Council and Committee Meetings

A policy for public participation is in place and referred to on agendas. Pre-meetings are held with the Chairman/Vice-Chairman for an hour every Wednesday. A check of a selection of minutes indicated that a quorum was present in accordance with Standing Orders. The agendas checked gave at least 3 clear days' notice and included: apologies, declarations of interests, minutes of the last meeting, a summons for Council meetings, signed by the proper officer, the business to be transacted was clear and specific with no general, unclear or misleading headings. A calendar of meetings is published for the year ahead, and meetings are publicised on the UTC website, on noticeboards at the library and at the council offices. Welcome sheets are available at all meetings giving the public useful information about public participation. Draft minutes are published within three days of the last meeting.

Recommendation: That the Foundation logo from the Local Council Award Scheme be removed from UTC documents as this accreditation has since expired and UTC is in the throes of considering a new application for reaccreditation.

4.11 Annual Parish Meeting

These are held annually in accordance with legislation.

Recommendation: That UTC grant recipients be invited to attend the Annual Parish Meeting to report on the progress of their projects within the local community in an attempt to generate more attendees at the meetings.



4.12 Annual Report

A comprehensive annual report of 21 pages was published for 2015/2016, and is available on the UTC website.

Recommendation: That the distribution of the annual report is delivered to all residents and businesses each year to be consistent with the distribution of the UTC newsletter, as referenced at section 7.3 External Communications.

Recommendation: That UTC considers including within its Annual Report (for distribution to its electorate) an article about its responsibilities as well as those of other partnership organisations, as referenced at section 3.5(j) above. This article should be included annually for as long as it is considered to help dispel existing public confusion.



5. Governance Area – Financial

5.1 Financial Regulations (FR)

These were last reviewed in November 2014 in accordance with the National Association of Local Councils Model Financial Regulations (MFR) at that time.

Recommendation: FR 1.6 should be amended in accordance with MFR 1.6 to provide for the possibility of disciplinary action in the event of breach of the Regulations, rather than a definitive statement as to gross misconduct.

Recommendation: MFR 5.8 relating to grant payments should look to be included.

Recommendation: FR 6.4 should be amended in accordance with MFR 6.4 to apply more generally than merely in respect of disclosable interests.

Recommendation: MFR 6.6 should look to be included.

Recommendation: FR 11 requires amendment in accordance with MFR 11 to ensure incorporation of the specific requirements of The Public Contracts Regulations 2015 (as explained in detail in LTN 87 and Legal Briefing L05-15 of January 2016).

Recommendation: FR 15.3 wording ‘affected’ should be amended to read ‘effected’.

5.2 Annual Return

There were some errors brought to UTC’s attention by the external auditor, Grant Thornton, where the most recent annual return was concerned. These were as follows:

- Period for the Exercise of Public Rights to be completed in accordance with the Local Audit and Accountability Act 2014, sections 26 and 27, and the Accounts and Audit Regulations 2015, sections 14 and 15 to ensure that the dates for the exercise of public rights are properly calculated;
- The signature and consideration of the Annual Governance Statement must be taken prior to the Accounting Statements, as stipulated by the Accounts and Audit Regulations 2015;
- The fixed asset figure at Box 9 was incorrectly understated by £18,289; and
- The total borrowing figure at Box 10 was incorrectly overstated by £29,994.

The outcome from the external auditor was reported to Council. The notices of audit and conclusion of audit are published on the UTC website.

Recommendation: To ensure that the 2016 figures are restated and indicated as such at the 2016-17 annual return in accordance with the 2015-16 External Audit report and to ensure that the Accounts and Audit Regulations 2015 are complied with where the period for the exercise of public rights and the order for approval of the accounts are concerned.



5.3 Internal Audit

An independent and competent internal auditor has recently been appointed for 2017-18 in accordance with Council procedures, and has direct access to the RFO / Town Clerk and key members and reports go to Council. Adequate budgetary provision is made for internal audit. The auditor will work to a robust template, which targets each system for review at least once during the period, subject to the requirements of the internal audit report embodied at section 4 of the annual return.

Recommendation: That UTC ensures that there is a signed engagement letter in place with the internal auditor confirming their independence from the authority.

5.4 Budget Setting Process, Monitoring & Precept

The budget setting process is open and transparent, and the budget headings are clear and appropriate following extensive reworking in the past eighteen months. Budget papers and any supporting documents are available to members of the public. The Town Clerk also provides a budget briefing and supporting comments and documentation as required. The budget is monitored on a regular basis by the Finance & General Purposes Committee in accordance with financial regulations. The budget and precept information is published on the UTC website.

Recommendation: That members are offered training on budgets.

5.5 Grants

A grant application policy is in place, dated October 2010 and is available on the UTC website but it is not clear when this was last reviewed. The application form and guidelines are clear and easy to understand. A sample check of awards showed that they were awarded in accordance with the policy and financial regulations. It is clear from the budget the provision made for grants.

Recommendation: That the policy is reviewed annually and that future awards now be made in accordance with quoting the General Power of Competence (which is a power of 'first resort') as opposed to Section 137 of the Local Government Act 1972.

Recommendation: That the awards and the policy is publicised more widely using the website and the UTC newsletter.



6. Governance Area – Risk Management

6.1 Strategy and Policy

There is a recently adopted financial and management risk assessment in place that is dated 5 October 2016.

Recommendation: That consideration be given to linking the policy to the emergency plan referenced under the recommendation at section 3.5(f) above.

6.2 Risk Assessment

Whilst UTC has a thorough financial and management risk assessment in place, it does not currently complete a thorough annual risk assessment for all Council activities with an associated action plan. Risk assessments were undertaken by WPS in March 2015 and require review.

Recommendation: That UTC considers the risk assessment training requirements for staff and members. This is also an area highlighted by the External Auditor in that risk assessments should be reviewed and adopted by Council at least annually.

6.3 Insurance

An annual review is completed by the Town Clerk in accordance with Financial Regulations. A new three-year long term agreement has recently been taken out with Zurich Municipal until 28 September 2019.



7. Governance Area – Community Interaction

7.1 Community Consultation

UTC have consulted on the neighbourhood plan, assets of community value and the redevelopment of Uppingham Town Hall with the use of 'survey monkey'. UTC also makes good and frequent use of the UTC Newsletter, Facebook and Twitter. A formal community engagement strategy was adopted in August 2011, see section 3.5(k) above.

7.2 Customer Services

The Council provides customer service at the council offices where residents can raise issues with, and seek information from, the Town Clerk. A community feedback log is kept, which in turn offers the opportunity of feedback to residents on issues raised. The Town Clerk operates an 'open door' policy during standard office hours Tuesday to Friday and these are widely publicised along with email and telephone contact details. UTC also makes full use of Facebook and Twitter on a regular basis.

7.3 External Communications

UTC provide a regular newsletter, which is delivered to all households within the town and local businesses. UTC also has a website which has a wealth of information and includes a schedule of meetings, agendas and minutes, contact details for staff, council and councillors and also promotes council activities.

Recommendation: See the recommendation on transparency and the website at section 3.4 above.

7.4 Councillor Surgeries

Formal councillor surgeries are held on the last Saturday of every month at the Council Offices in conjunction with the Rutland County Councillor representatives. These surgeries are publicised widely using social media, website and the Council Office noticeboard. Reports are fed back to Council.

Recommendation: That a policy be created for councillor surgeries.

7.5 Freedom of Information (FOI) / Publication Scheme

See section 3.5(b) above, the publication scheme makes it clear and easy to understand how to make a request under the FOI act.

7.6 Social Media

See section 3.5(l) above, the communications policy adequately covers the use of social media, which is controlled by the Town Clerk.



7.7 Press and Media

See section 3.5(l) above, the communications policy adequately covers dealing with the press and media including attendance at meetings and press releases.



8. Governance Area – Human Resources

8.1 Staffing

Also refer to sections 3.5 (s – bb) and 4.7 above. A staffing review has not been recently undertaken at UTC and the current resources could leave UTC vulnerable if operatives were to be absent. There is not currently a contingency plan in place during periods of annual leave to cover for the Town Clerk and this is of concern. The Town Clerk is the head of paid staff. Job descriptions and contracts of employment for all staff need reviewing.

Recommendation: UTC may wish to consider employing specialist HR advisors, to ensure that all legislative requirements are in place and to implement where needed.

8.2 Employee Handbook

There is not an employee handbook currently in place, see sections 3.5 (s – bb), 4.7 and 8.1 above.

8.3 Training, Staff Development and Appraisals

See section 3.5(h) above which refers to training and development. An appraisal was undertaken with the Town Clerk in May 2016.

Recommendation: That appraisals are offered to all staff members on an annual basis and action plans are produced where appropriate, with objectives for staff linked to the strategic plan (see section 4.1 above). All staff should be encouraged to progress with their individual continuous professional development.

8.4 Staff Retention

There is not a staff retention policy in place, see section 3.5(y) above. When staff leave their employment, exit interviews are not completed.

Recommendation: Exit interviews should be completed when staff leave the employment of UTC, to ascertain their reason for leaving and if it is for any specific reason related to their employment with UTC.

8.5 Membership of Professional Bodies

UTC supports and funds membership of appropriate professional bodies for the Town Clerk and also supports and funds Council membership of appropriate professional regional and national organisation.



9. Conclusion

Uppingham Town Council (UTC) is a pro-active council that is involved in many projects within the community. The Council is managed by a recently qualified and proactive town clerk with an enthusiastic attitude, who has implemented many new procedures within his first two years in post. The Town Clerk does appear however to require some additional support in order to work more efficiently in driving forward the aims and ambitions of the Council.

The Town Council's partnership work with varying community organisations requires a more defined focus as this area still causes some concern amongst members and the local community, particularly as not all organisations are seen to be working in tandem. A document helping to define the roles and responsibilities of UTC and its partner organisations would prove a helpful referral tool for consistency as UTC appears to be contacted about this area often by its local community.

As Uppingham does not contain any division of wards, the fifteen members of the Council do not have clearly defined areas of responsibility for the electorate. It was queried during this study whether 15 members may be too great a representation for a town with a population of approximately 5,000 and this is an area that UTC could explore further with Rutland County Council to bring about change and/or defined ward boundaries for the electorate.

The parish and town council sector is changing fast and there will be many challenges ahead, UTC appears well equipped to meet these needs in terms of governance and performance but it must ensure that it is well equipped to meet those challenges in terms of resources. It is hoped that the recommendations in this report will be enacted which will enhance UTC's ability to work within a framework which provides good governance and the ability to perform to a high standard.