

BETLEY, BALTERLEY & WRINEHILL PARISH COUNCIL

Risk Assessment May 2010

1. The Council's Areas of Risk

The Council's areas of potential risk can be divided in three:

Physical Risk. The danger of land, property or structures owned or controlled by the Parish Council leading to physical harm to residents, members or other third parties. Where the Council has responsibility in such areas it is important that it acts to minimise any risk, and protects itself as a corporate body, and its members/ staff individually, against any consequences of its actions or inactions.

Financial Risk. The Council handles public money. It is important that money is handled securely, that expenditure is incurred appropriately, and that there is an audit trail to clearly show that the Council accounts for its money in a proper way. Again, the Council should protect itself against consequences of any failures which may occur.

Policy Risk. The Council is required to make corporate decisions which may have consequences. It is important that the Council is conscious of the possible implications of policy decisions, particularly as these may lead to financial, legal or other issues.

2. The Council's Response to Risk

The Council can address risk in two ways: by seeking to eliminate the risk (or at least to minimise the dangers) by way of implementing 'counter measures' ; or, where possible and appropriate, by taking out insurance cover against the risk (although the Council would still need to be seen to be acting in an appropriate and responsible manner).

Betley, Balterley & Wrinehill Parish Council addresses risk in both ways.

3. The Council's exposure and response to risk

Physical Risk. The Council has ownership of and responsibility for the following land, property and structures:

Land holding at **Laudy Croft**;

Land holding of part of the site known as the **Memorial Garden**;

Two **bus shelters** – one adjacent to the Village Hall (wooden); one close to East Lawns (steel & glass);

Three **noticeboards** located at Balterley (A531); Balterley (B5500); and Betley (Memorial Garden);

Three **benches** located at Wrinehill, Church Lane (Betley) and Memorial Garden (Betley).

At the time the current Clerk took office (June 2006) the Council's Asset Register was incomplete, and the above list has been formed as information has come to light, but is now believed to be complete.

The Council addresses risk at these locations in the following ways:

Laudy Croft – a Working Group of members, elected at each Annual Meeting, is required to inspect the site and report any essential remedial works (such as signage replacement and weed treatment) required on a monthly basis. This method has proved effective, giving early notice of problems and has allowed appropriate work to be carried out e.g. replacement of warning signs; works to a tree damaged by winter gales. The site, a former waste tip, is designated as a potentially contaminated site and is closed to the public. It is fenced, and adequately signed. The Council is awaiting a site inspection by the Borough Council to examine the degree of any potential contamination, and has an earmarked reserve to fund any subsequent works (as advised by District Audit). The Parish Council is of the opinion that the current counter measures are adequate and proportionate.

Memorial Garden, Bus Shelters, Noticeboard and Benches – the Clerk, as part of his monthly posting of notices, carries out regular inspections of these sites and structures. Any defects are brought to the attention of members and any remedial action is then taken. Provision exists for immediate action if health and safety issues arise, but this has not occurred to date. The Parish Council is of the opinion that this approach is reasonable and proportionate. A policy has been agreed in respect of the use of the Memorial Garden, which includes a risk assessment requirement.

The Council carries substantial insurance cover, with public liability indemnity of £5,000,000, which is considered to be adequate given the measures in place to assess the physical condition of its assets. The Parish Council understands that such cover is usual.

Financial Risk. The Council has an annual precept (2009-10) of £10,130 and a turnover (same year) of £14,180. At 31 March 2010 the

Council's resources totalled £23,149. The Council employs robust measures to ensure financial probity:-

All expenditure is supported by invoice or by a Council resolution to expend the sum involved; all cheques are normally signed by three members (on rare occasions the Clerk acts as the third signatory, but not on any payment in which he has a personal interest) at a meeting of the Council; the cheque stubs are signed/ initialled by the signatories. A financial statement is presented to each (monthly) meeting by the Clerk. In the past two years further steps have been taken, following a consideration of risk, to strengthen these procedures in that invoices are also now signed by cheque signatories, and the Clerk presents a monthly bank reconciliation supported by bank statements which are checked by the Chairman, and open to viewing by all members.

Although these measures are considered adequate to protect the Council's interests, insurance cover is also held with Fidelity Cover to £30,000: a figure which the Parish Council deems to be appropriate.

Policy Risk. The Council is very aware of the potential dangers which can follow on from policy decisions – the Audit Report in the Public Interest some years ago underlined this issue.

Members are very conscious that in making policy decisions they need to ensure that the potential results of such a decision have been considered. This is best ensured by a diligent approach coupled with the conscientiousness of both members and their Clerk. The Council feels that its record in recent years shows that it is aware of this issue, and has acted responsibly. Major policy decisions are subject to detailed discussion.

A significant number of members have undergone a programme of member training arranged through the county association of parish councils; the register of members' interests is maintained; at each meeting members are encouraged to declare any interests as a fixed agenda item, or otherwise as necessary or appropriate. There were no cases of member behaviour being criticised through Standards Board procedures in 2008-09 and so no actions fell to be taken under this area of risk in 2009-10.

In addition all significant policy statements are articulated by way of a written policy document that is considered by the members at a Parish Council meeting and then voted upon. A recent example is the policy in relation to use of the Memorial Garden.

The Clerk has a responsibility for communicating various Parish Council decisions, particularly in respect of planning matters, to other bodies. A file of such communications is maintained by the Clerk and is available for inspection by members at the monthly Parish Council meeting.

Where the Chairman writes on behalf of members to thank an individual, or for other reasons, a copy of that letter is provided to the Clerk for the record.

4. Summary

The Council is aware of its responsibility to assess potential risks, and to take appropriate actions. Through a combination of sound practice (through its financial and audit arrangements, inspection and maintenance of assets, measured policy making and probity of members and staff) and adequate insurance cover it believes that it has adequate measures in place to assess and manage risk.

The present membership of the Council has made improvements to the assessment and management of risk since 2007, and has made further significant improvements during the past twelve months.

The above document was approved by the Council at its meeting of 27th May 2010, as Minute No. 126/10.

Gwyn Griffiths
Clerk
(May 2010)