

OAKHAM TOWN COUNCIL MEETING — AGENDA PAPER

Meeting Date: September 2, 2026

Agenda Item: 7

Title: Professional Review and Drafting of Council Governance Documentation

Report From: Martin Brookes

1. Purpose of Report

To provide members with background, contextual analysis, and strategic options regarding the proposed engagement of a legally qualified specialist to independently review, draft, and produce a comprehensive, cohesive suite of council governance documentation, including standing orders, financial regulations, committee procedures, and administrative policies.

2. Background and Context

Good local governance relies heavily on clear, legally sound, and up-to-date procedural rules. Over successive electoral terms, Oakham Town Council's governance documents comprising Standing Orders, Financial Regulations, committee terms of reference, and operational policies have accumulated incremental amendments, revisions, and supplementary protocols.

While individual amendments addressed specific operational needs at the time of writing, the cumulative result is an occasionally fragmented framework containing potential internal inconsistencies, ambiguities regarding statutory compliance, and operational friction between committee delegations and full Council powers and plenty of other issues

Engaging a specialist external legal practitioner ensures that the Council's foundational documents are:

- Strictly aligned with current local government legislation and national model rules.
- Internally consistent, eliminating contradictory clauses between Standing Orders and Financial Regulations.
- Optimised for clarity, transparency, and efficient administrative execution.

3. Financial and Resource Implications

- **Financial Cost:** Engaging an external legal specialist with expertise in local council governance will incur professional fees. Preliminary estimates suggest a fixed-fee quotation or capped expenditure limit should be negotiated prior to commencement around £3000 and the Clerk has delegated power to use professional bodies.
- **Budgetary Provision:** Funding for professional legal advice and governance reviews can be drawn from the professional fees or Legal fees if we have spent both our reserves.
- **Officer Resource:** Utilising external expertise mitigates the significant strain that a root-and-branch redrafting exercise would otherwise place on internal officer time, allowing core administrative functions to continue uninterrupted.

4. Risk Assessment

- **Legal and Compliance Risk:** Maintaining outdated or ambiguous standing orders exposes the Council to procedural challenges, potential judicial review of decisions, and breaches of statutory duties.
- **Reputational Risk:** A robust and transparent governance framework enhances public confidence in council decision-making and fiscal stewardship.
- **Operational Risk:** Clear procedures reduce ambiguity in meetings, limit procedural disputes, and streamline debate.

5. Motion for Consideration

MOTION: That Council consider and decide upon the engagement of a legally qualified specialist to draft and produce a comprehensive, cohesive suite of council papers, procedures, standing orders, and regulations.

6. Recommended Actions for Council

1. Discuss the merits and scope of engaging an external specialist for governance documentation review.
2. Authorise the Town Clerk to invite and evaluate fixed-fee proposals from qualified legal specialists experienced in local government law.
3. The Clerk reports back to the full Council upon completion for the council to consider and adopt the draft suite.