

EDGCOTT PARISH COUNCIL

Creating Policies Policy 04



Adopted: 21 April 2021

Reviewed May 2025

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I PURPOSE

Policies are a necessary part of any organisation. They define the parameters around which the organisation operates and influence the behaviour of people in the pursuit of a common goal. Policies can help keep an organisation running smoothly — but only if they are clearly defined, carefully written, and have a legitimate purpose.

This Policy describes how Edgcott Parish Council will decide on the need for a Policy and how it should be developed consistently such as to clearly lay out how Councillors and council employees are expected to act for maximum benefit to the organisation.

Policies should also ensure requirements placed on Councillors and staff are always efficiently achievable in practice such as to recognise the legal and fiscal resource constraints within which Council has to operate.

This Policy describes the 10 items to be kept in mind as policies are developed.

NOTES:

- Where the word “councillor” is used, unless the context suggests otherwise, the meaning is intended to include non-councillors, with or without voting rights, and council employees.
- A ‘co-opted member’ is a person who is not an elected member of the Council but who has been co-opted onto the Council, or a committee or sub-committee properly constituted by Council, by a majority of elected Councillors at a properly constituted meeting of Council and who is entitled to vote on any question that falls to be decided at any meeting of Council or that committee or sub-committee.
- A ‘meeting’ is a properly constituted meeting of the Council, any of its committees, sub-committees, joint committees or joint sub-committees.
- Unless otherwise expressed, a reference to a Member of the Council includes a co-opted member of the Council.
- Where gender specific wording is used, meaning is intended to be gender neutral.

II SCOPE

To be used for all Council Policies.

III POLICY

1: Ensure that there is a policy on policies

It is important to work within a predefined and agreed upon framework when it comes to policy formation. Creating a simple policy on policies that defines the organisation’s process for creating new policies is an important first step in maturing policies. This “meta policy” should include guidance as to what situations constitute the need and scope for a new policy, the format that new

policies should use, and the process that needs to be followed for a new policy to be approved. The absence of a process and framework around policy formation represents a risk of introducing significant inconsistency not only in outcomes but also inconsistency in development can lead to poor or difficult enforcement.

2: Identify any overlap with existing policies

It is important to check any new policy does not replicate or contradict other Policies either in whole or in part. Revise an existing policy rather than create a brand new one.

3: Collaborate with others

Developing Policies in isolation can lack key factors or be slanted in ways that were not positive for the organisation overall. Develop Policies with input from those that will be bound by them and those affected by them.

While the final policy may ultimately not reflect all opinions, it is important that all stakeholders be heard to minimise the potential for unintended consequences.

Policies need to be complete and additional opinions can help close any gaps that may exist.

4: Consider the need

Policies put into place without a specific need are wasteful, confusing and can bring policy making into disrepute.

Needless Policies do not generally happen where a policy on policies is in place, as the policy will generally go through multiple levels for approval and somewhere along the way, someone will step back and ask the question, “Why do we need this?”

Policies should be enacted when there is a clear need and a clear problem to solve.

5: Use the right words to avoid misunderstanding intent

Policies must be understood to be effective. Use of clear and unambiguous grammar aids in this effort. Use simple and specific terminology that can be easily understood by everyone. Use the words “must” or “will” rather than “should” in the body of the policy. The latter implies that the action is optional, which makes the need for the policy questionable. If something is optional, use the word “should” — but not when it is a requirement.

Always use an office, department, unit, or job title instead of an individual’s name. Examples: “The CIO’s office is responsible for...”; “Contact the assistant to the CFO to...”

Contact emails should always be the office of the Clerk in the first instance or the contact form on the Council website.

Do not underline subheadings or words that need to be stressed in a sentence. Rather, set subheadings in bold or italics if a word needs to be stressed. Underlined words can be mistaken for hyperlinks when the policy is posted online.

6: When possible, include an exceptions process

It is much easier to define in advance how an exceptions process is to operate before the policy goes into force.

At some point, a situation will arise that requires an exception. Since policies are implemented to control behaviour and are supposed to level the playing field, it is critical that exceptions also be granted in a way that is fair and equitable.

If the exceptions process is loose or missing, the entire policy could be called into question.

7: Allow some shades of grey

Policies should not be 'airtight' or an exceptions process be such that that no one can question. Some policies need to leave a little ambiguity for people to make decisions.

This is not to say that the policy should just let people do whatever they want, but instances in which people are allowed to use "that's policy" or "zero tolerance" excuses to avoid doing the right thing must be avoided.

If a policy leaves a little bit a grey a person can make an on-the-fly decision, that's okay if it enhances the goals of the Council.

8: Define policy maintenance responsibility

Council policies require periodic review – usually annually at the May meeting - to ensure their continued applicability. Further, as questions are raised about the policy, someone needs to be able to request clarifying information from the office - not an individual - that is responsible for the policy.

9: Keep senior executives out of the routine when possible

It is unrealistic for the Chairman to develop all policies. The exceptions process that is put into place empowers any Councillor to identify changes and handle exceptions. The nominated person need not be the Chairman or an employee, except when it's required due to regulation or law. Whilst Councillors need not develop every policy, the Council as a whole should hold responsibility for reviewing new policies before they go into production and regularly thereafter.

10: Establish a Policy Register with versioning

All Councillors and residents of the parish should be able to access all appropriate policies all the time and to be able to tell if they are current.

The Council is required under statute to publish its Policies to its web site and to review them annually.

When it comes to versioning, as policies evolve, it is good to see their history to track what has changed over time.