Witham Town Council – Fire Safety Policy

Policy Overview

This policy has been prepared to help Witham Town Council comply with its legal obligations to staff and visitors under the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005, the Fire Safety Act 2021, and the Fire Safety (England) Regulations 2022 and Section 156 of the Building Safety Act 2022. The Town Council is committed to taking all reasonably practicable steps to ensure the health, safety and welfare of staff, Councillors, service users and other persons who may be affected by its activities. This fire safety policy also forms part of the Town Council's general health and safety policy. This policy covers all assets and estates owned by the Town Council.

The Responsible Person

The overall responsibility for fire safety resides with the Town Council. Under the Fire Safety Order, the "Responsible Person" is typically the employer or the person in control of the premises. The Town Council's responsibility for ensuring the implementation of this policy will be managed through the Town Clerk and/or an appointed officer. They will be responsible for ensuring that:

- Current fire regulations are met.
- Appropriate fire safety policies are in place to reduce the risk of an outbreak of fire and to reduce the risk of the spread of fire.
- Fire safety risk assessments under the Act must now cover internal areas, structure, all external walls (including cladding, balconies and windows).
- Appropriate means of escape are in place.
- The Town Council's fire risk assessments are carried out by a competent person.
- Matters arising from fire risk assessments are addressed promptly.
- Appropriate records and documentation in respect of fire safety management are maintained.

Fire Marshals

The Town Clerk will appoint and train an appropriate number of fire marshals who will:

- Assist with the co-ordination of fire safety matters.
- Assist in evacuations.
- Make contact and provide information to the local Fire and Rescue Service.
- Monitor fire doors, escape routes, and external wall issues as identified in risk assessments

Duties of Staff

Each staff member is responsible for maintaining a fire safe environment for all staff and visitors. Staff have an individual responsibility to prevent the outbreak of fire and to ensure they do not place themselves or others at risk of harm. Staff should make themselves aware of the Town Council's fire safety procedures and follow these established procedures for the management of an actual or suspected fire incident. Staff must promptly report any deficiencies in fire safety systems, including fire doors, alarms, and escape route obstructions, and participate in reviews or drills as required.

Hirers of Town Hall Facilities

Regular and occasional hirers of the Town Council facilities and Community Centre are required to comply with the fire safety evacuation procedures provided as part of their booking. Hirers must provide details of their activity and inform the Town Council if they intend to bring any electrical appliance on site. Hirers are responsible for ensuring that they maintain a fire safe environment during their period of hire and must comply with the booking conditions. Occasional hirers are reminded of the fire safety evacuation procedures at the start of their period of hire and copies of the fire safety evacuation are displayed around the premises.

Contractors and Other Visitors

All contractors employed by the Town Council on its premises should be made aware of the fire safety procedures. They have an individual responsibility to prevent the outbreak of fire and to ensure they do not place themselves or others at risk of harm. Staff should ensure that contractors work in a fire safe manner. Staff should brief the evacuation procedures to all visitors who enter the premises beyond the public areas. These visitors should not be left alone unless they are aware of, or familiar with available escape routes.

Staff Training

All staff shall receive a fire safety briefing on their first day at work to include:

- Their responsibilities in respect of fire safety.
- Fire evacuation procedures.
- Specific hazards or fire risks in their working area.

All staff including part time staff, will receive appropriate fire safety training as soon as practicable following the start of their employment with the Town Council. Refresher training will be provided if and when:

- Material changes are made to the premises.
- Staff activities warrant further training.
- A fire risk assessment indicated deficiencies.
- A staff appraisal considers refresher training appropriate.

Staff appointed as Fire Marshalls will receive appropriate additional training as required.

Fire drills will be conducted at least annually and more frequently as recommended by the Town Clerk or Responsible Fire Officer. All staff will receive training on the use of fire extinguishers.

Documents and Records

The Town Council are responsible for keeping appropriate fire safety records for the Town Hall. These will be kept in good order, up to date and available for scrutiny at any time. The records will include:

- The fire safety policy.
- Fire evacuation procedures.
- Copies of fire risk assessments.
- Records of fire training and fire drills.
- Records of annual inspection and testing of firefighting equipment.

- Records of periodic testing of emergency lighting and fire alarms.
- Records of all maintenance to fire detection and alarm systems.
- Records of storage of any hazardous substances.
- Records of any unwanted alarm activations and action taken.
- Plans of the Town Hall and any evacuation routes.

All fire safety documents must be easily accessible to staff and enforcement authorities. A system for regular review and updating of fire safety documentation will be implemented.

Maintenance of Fire Safety Systems and Equipment

The results of all test, maintenance, faults and actions taken in respect of fire safety systems and equipment shall be retained. Items to be maintained include any alarms and detection equipment, fire-fighting equipment, emergency lighting, fire doors and exits and any literature such as fire notices and evacuations procedures.

Regular PAT (Portable Appliance Testing) will be conducted for all electrical equipment, and procedures will be established for reporting and addressing electrical hazards.

Fire Risk Assessments

Written fire risk assessments will be produced by the Town Council for each of its premises by a competent person in line with current guidance. These will be reviewed regularly, not just annually, and particularly when there are significant changes to the premises or activities. Additional reviews will be conducted due to material change or alteration to the building, or if there has been a significant change in the activity carried out on the premises.

Relevant fire safety information will be shared with other responsible persons for the building, if applicable.

Procedures

The Town Council will periodically practice fire evacuation procedures in line with the recommendation of the fire risk assessments. All established escape routes will be kept in working order and free from obstruction and combustible material at all times. Operation of fire doors will be tested in line with the recommendations of the fire risk assessments. Fire-fighting equipment will be provided in line with the recommendation of the fire risk assessments and these will be regularly serviced and maintained by a competent person. Staff are required to report any defective or missing equipment to the Town Clerk.

An appropriate fire alarm and detection system will be provided in the Town Hall and Community Centre. The type and extent of the alarm will be determined by the findings of the fire risk assessments. Alarm systems will be regularly maintained and tested. Maintenance and tests will be recorded in the fire log.

Emergency lighting will be provided for escape routes where applicable. The need for and the extent of emergency lighting will be determined by the findings of the fire risk assessments. Emergency lighting will be regularly maintained and tested. Maintenance and tests will be recorded in the fire logs.

All fire resisting doors and partitions will be kept in good order as part of regular maintenance programmes. Staff are required to ensure that any fire door provided remains closed unless it is retained by an automatic release magnet.

Appropriate signs and notices will be displayed, giving clear instructions to staff and others in the event of fire. In addition, signs will be provided to indicate the position of fire extinguishers, fire alarm call points and to indicate the emergency exit routes as determined by the fire risk assessments.

An emergency evacuation plan will be developed and maintained, including procedures for assisting vulnerable individuals during evacuations.

Adopted: Policy and Resources 03.10.2022 (Minute 18)

Reviewed: Policy and Resources 21.09.2026

Review date: September 2027