THE ACRE GOOD PRACTICE QUALITY STANDARD

3rd Edition

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ACRE
Standard

defra
Department for Environment
Food and Rural Affairs

ACRE's **Good Practice Quality Standard** (3rd Edition) is endorsed at levels 2 and 3

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THE ACRE GOOD PRACTICE QUALITY STANDARD

1.   Introduction

ACRE (Action with Communities in Rural England) is a national charity whose purpose is to support sustainable rural community development. Its members are the Rural Community Councils in England. Together, ACRE and the RCCs make up the Rural Community Action Network (RCAN). ACRE produced the Good Practice Quality Standard (the ACRE Standard) as part of a national improvement strategy for RCAN. The Standards are supported by DEFRA and endorsed by the Charity Commission.

The ACRE Standard contains requirements that define good practice for Rural Community Councils (RCCs).   It covers 9 areas of good practice in the organisational management of an RCC. Each of these contains a number of requirements and is defined at 3 levels. These are:

- Level 1 – basic requirements that all RCCs should be meeting as a matter of priority

- Level 2 – more advanced requirements that all RCCs will be expected to implement

- Level 3 – an ongoing requirement to ensure that everything in levels 1 and 2 is actually happening, and to review and improve the way that you are carrying out the above requirements.

The Standard is designed so that it can be used for self-assessment by an RCC to work out where it complies with the requirements and what needs to be done to fully meet all the individual quality areas.

A process of peer review has been developed that provides external validation of whether you meet the requirements of the Standard at a pre-defined level.

This document contains:

- Guidance on self assessment

- The 9 Organisational Standards

- A self assessment sheet for each Standard

- An action plan sheet for each Standard

- A list of the key documents required by the Standard

- Definitions of terms used in the Standard

2. Guidance on self-assessment

2.1 Overview

The Standard describes the sorts of things that a good RCC should be doing. In order to check whether you are meeting the individual requirements of the Standard, you will have to carry out an assessment of your organisation.

This 'self assessment' involves a small team of people from within the RCC. They look for evidence of whether the requirements are being met.

If a requirement is not being met, you need to work out what you have to do to meet it, and make sure that you take this action.

2.2 Planning the self assessment

Before you begin the self-assessment process, you need to:

- Make sure that Trustees and managers are committed to using the ACRE Standard to improve your RCC.

- Tell staff that you are using the ACRE Standard to help you improve what you do and the way that you do it; that you will welcome suggestions for improvements from them; and that it may involve changes in the way that things are done.

- Plan how you are going to do it. It is probably best to set up a small team to manage the process. This could consist o a group of people (4-6 may be a good number depending on the size of your organisation. This group could include your (Trustee) Quality Champion, your (staff) lead person on quality, an Officer or project worker, a manager and a front line member of staff. Their job will be to confirm that there is suitable evidence of how each of the requirements is met.

- The actual process of evidence gathering and involving other members of staff and Trustees is described in paragraph 2.3.

- Decide if you are going to 'do' the Standard one level at a time. This is probably the easiest way, rather than all levels at once.

- Set a time frame for carrying it out.

- Give your self-assessment team and other staff involved in the process the support and time they need to meet these targets – do not just add it on top of their normal workload!

2.3 Carrying out the self assessment

The team should meet and go through each of the 9 Organisational Standards at the agreed level(s). For each requirement they should ask:

- Do we have evidence to give us confidence that we meet the requirement?
- If not, what do we need to do to provide that evidence?

There are various ways of doing this:

- The team may wish to look for all the evidence themselves, although this could be quite onerous

- You may want to expand the team to include other people to look at specific areas where they have expertise

- You could set up working groups that each take on an Organisational Standard(s). They could involve a cross- section of staff, Trustees and other volunteers where appropriate; or using a Finance Committee to look at the Financial Management Standard; or any other mechanism that involves people from different parts of the RCC. These groups then report back their findings to the team

At the end of the evidence gathering process, the results of what you have found should be recorded. There is a sheet after each individual Organisational Standard for you to record with a tick where you are in relation to meeting the standard. You should tick:

- 'No' if you can provide no evidence that you are meeting that requirement
- 'Partly' if you are part of the way there
- 'Yes' if you feel that you fully meet the requirement and can evidence this

Many of the requirements are straightforward and 'black or white'. These can be easily answered. Some will require you to think and come to a judgment about whether you feel that you are doing enough. You can always improve, and the Standard does not look for perfection, so do not be too critical of yourself.

On the other hand, do not be too complacent either. You should apply the test of reasonableness to your answers. The process of self-assessment is meant to make you think, rather than just automatically tick boxes.

For those requirements where you have more to do, the second sheet after each quality area can be used. This is in two parts.

The 'To be done' part should be used to record:

- What action needs to be taken, such as 'produce a petty cash procedure'
- What resources you need to do it (usually time!)
- When you will do it by
- Who will do it

These sheets can either be filled in by the team itself and presented to the Management Team and Board for their agreement and support; or the team can just present its conclusions on the evidence sheets to the Management Team/Board and let them decide on the actions required.

Either way, management will then have to make sure that the agreed action is carried out by the defined time.

The 'Check it was done' part is filled in when the relevant deadline for action has been reached. You should record:

- The date of the review of the action
- Who carried out the review
- The result of the review – which hopefully will be that you have achieved your objective.

Once all the actions have been undertaken, you can go back to your first sheet and tick all the boxes as 'met'.

2.4 Level 3

Level 3 is different from levels 1 and 2. The first two levels require you to put systems, procedures, documents, etc in place. However, it is not enough just to have systems in place. They must be properly implemented or followed, and regularly reviewed and improved.

Level 3 therefore is designed to check on two things related to the previous levels:

(i) Have you effectively **implemented** all the requirements of levels 1 and 2? An annual review by the self-assessment team, the management team or the Board of Trustees (or a mixture) should be carried out. For each of the nine Organisational Standards, are all the systems that they require being implemented properly?

(ii) Are there any improvements that you could make to what you do, for each of the Organisational Standards, under the overall heading for that Standard?

These two elements could be covered by spending a day each year going through each of the nine Standards and identifying if there are any requirements where quality has fallen or things are not being done, as they should be. In addition, the reviewers should ask themselves 'how can we carry out work under the heading of this Standard better?'

There is no need to go through each requirement in detail – as an organisation you should have knowledge as to where you are not doing as well as you could, for example from staff surveys, performance results or client feedback.

The 'review and continued improvement' requirement at Level 3 cannot be checked until one year following confirmation of compliance at Level 2 of the ACRE Standards. Thereafter, RCCs will be required to undertake review and improvement checks at yearly intervals, with formal peer reviews being undertaken on a three-yearly basis.

2.5   What is a procedure?

The Standard refers to written procedures being required in some cases.

A 'procedure' is a defined way of carrying out a process or activity. They have to be written down so that staff know what to do. Levels 1 and 2 focus on getting all the required procedures in place; as stated above, level 3 then checks that they are being implemented properly.

2.6   And Finally

Using the Standard for self-assessment is much more about the Standard supporting your RCC in the process of change and the move towards being better managed and delivering quality services, than ticking boxes to say you have achieved the Standard.

This Standard should be a vital tool for proving to funders that Rural Community Councils are well-managed organisations capable of delivering relevant, high quality services for the communities they serve.

Good luck with your improvement process.

Edition 3 of the ACRE Standard:

The new requirements that have been requested by the Charity Commission are marked with a (C). Those that are defined by the Charity Commission as legal requirements are also marked with an (L).

STANDARD 1 – BUSINESS PLANNING

Business planning involves having defined strategy/ies, aims and objectives for the organisation, and putting this into practice through agreed policies and plans. RCCs need to carry out business planning annually and over the medium term (usually 3 years) to define how they are going to meet their aims and objectives.

Level 1 – Basic Requirements

1. Your mission, values, aims and objectives are defined, documented and communicated to Trustees, paid staff, volunteers and other relevant stakeholders

2. There is an annual planning process: an annual business plan is produced and communicated to Trustees, staff and relevant stakeholders

3. The organisation has a clear mission and strategies, which are regularly reviewed (C)

4. Services provided clearly relate to the stated charitable purposes (C) (L)

5. The organisation is independent. It recognizes that it exists to pursue its own purposes and not those of any other body (C) (L)

6. You know who your stakeholders are, identify their needs, and feed these into the planning process

7. Stakeholders are provided with details of the full range and type of services provided

8. Key output targets are contained in the business plan

9. Performance against the annual business plan is monitored

Level 2 – Advanced Requirements

1. Long term strategic planning is carried out, and a medium term business plan produced

2. Services provided clearly relate to aims and objectives

3. Outcome measures are defined for key services: these must be documented and linked to the RCCs objectives

4. Relevant stakeholders are involved in strategic and annual planning

5. Strategic planning identifies future staffing and other resource requirements

Level 3 – Continued Implementation and Improvement

1. The effective implementation of levels 1 and 2 is checked annually

2. The effectiveness of the business planning process is reviewed and improved at defined intervals

1.   Business Planning : Self Assessment

Level 1 - Basic Requirements	Standard Met?		
	No	Partly	Yes
1. Your mission, values, aims and objectives are defined, documented and communicated to Trustees, staff, volunteers and other relevant stakeholders			
2. There is an annual planning process: an annual business plan is produced and communicated to Trustees, staff and relevant stakeholders			
3. The organisation has a clear mission and strategies, which are regularly reviewed (C)			
4. Services provided clearly relate to the stated charitable purposes (C) (L)			
5. The organisation is independent. It recognizes that it exists to pursue its own purposes and not those of any other body (C) (L)			
6. You know who your stakeholders are, identify their needs, and feed these into the planning process			
7. Stakeholders are provided with details of the full range and type of services provided			
8. Key output targets are contained in the business plan			
9. Performance against the annual business plan is monitored			

Level 2 - Advanced Requirements	Standard Met?		
	No	Partly	Yes
1. Long term strategic planning is carried out, and a medium term business plan produced			
2. Services provided clearly relate to aims and objectives			
3. Outcome measures are defined for key services: these must be documented and linked to the RCCs objectives			
4. Relevant stakeholders are involved in strategic and annual planning			
5. Strategic planning identifies future staffing and other resource requirements			

Level 3 - Continued Implementation and Improvement	Standard Met?		
	No	Partly	Yes
1. The effective implementation of levels 1 and 2 is checked annually			
2. The effectiveness of the business planning process is reviewed and improved at defined intervals			

Standard 1 - Business Planning : Action Plan

TO BE DONE   **CHECK IT WAS DONE**

Agreed Action	Resources Needed	By When	By Whom	Review Date and Who Reviews	Result of Review

STANDARD 2 – USER-CENTRED SERVICES

RCCs have a number of 'users' of their services, from individuals that they directly provide services to, to other organisations. These users should be the focus of your activities. You need to understand who they are and what their needs are. These needs then must be taken into account when designing your services. You must tell users what services they will be given and obtain feedback from them on what they think about service provision. You must also ensure effective communication with them.

The needs of potential users of your services also need to be taken into account

Level 1 – Basic Requirements

1. Your main user groups are identified

2. The overall needs of users are ascertained, and the range and type of services provided are based on, and appropriate to, those needs

3. Your mission, aims and objectives are based on identified local community needs

4. Planned and regular feedback is obtained from each main user group

5. Basic information is kept on users, such as numbers, types, etc

6. There is a written complaints policy and procedure

7. Premises and events are accessible to all potential users of them, in line with legal requirements

Level 2 – Advanced Requirements

1. Feedback from users is analysed and used to improve service provision, and to plan future service delivery

2. You regularly review whether your charitable purposes are relevant to the needs of your beneficiaries (C)

3. You can explain or demonstrate how your activities are for public benefit (C)

4. Comprehensive potential and actual users' needs analysis is carried out, and service delivery is fundamentally linked to this

5. The organisation considers the development of innovative solutions and services to meet user needs (C)

6. Complaints and comments from users are used to improve service provision

7. Demographic analysis of users is undertaken in order to improve service access

8. The organisation engages with diverse communities and promotes diversity and equality (C)

9. Users are involved in and kept informed of service development

Level 3 – Continued Implementation and Improvement

1. The effective implementation of levels 1 and 2 is checked annually

2. The effectiveness of the processes for ensuring user-centered services are reviewed and improved at defined intervals

2.   User-Centred Services : Self Assessment

Level 1 - Basic Requirements	Standard Met?		
	No	Partly	Yes
1. Your main user groups are identified			
2. The overall needs of users are ascertained, and the range and type of services provided are based on, and appropriate to, those needs			
3. Your mission, aims and objectives are based on identified local community needs			
4. Planned and regular feedback is obtained from each main user group			
5. Basic information is kept on users, such as numbers, types, etc			
6. There is a written complaints policy and procedure			
7. Premises and events are accessible to all potential users of them, in line with legal requirements			

Level 2 - Advanced Requirements	Standard Met?		
	No	Partly	Yes
1. Feedback from users is analysed and used to improve service provision, and to plan future service delivery			
2. You regularly review whether your charitable purposes are relevant to the needs of your beneficiaries (C)			
3. You can explain or demonstrate how your activities are for public benefit (C)			
4. Comprehensive potential and actual users' needs analysis is carried out, and service delivery is fundamentally linked to this			
5. The organisation considers the development of innovative solutions and services to meet user needs (C)			
6. Complaints and comments from users are used to improve service provision			
7. Demographic analysis of users is undertaken in order to improve service access			
8. The organisation engages with diverse communities and promotes diversity and equality (C)			
9. Users are involved in and kept informed of service development			

Level 3 - Continued Implementation and Improvement	Standard Met?		
	No	Partly	Yes
1. The effective implementation of levels 1 and 2 is checked annually			
2. The effectiveness of the processes for ensuring user-centred services are reviewed and improved at defined intervals			

Standard 2 - User-Centred Services :   Action Plan

<table>
<tr><td colspan="4" align="center">TO BE DONE</td><td colspan="2" align="center">CHECK IT WAS DONE</td></tr>
<tr><th>Agreed Action</th><th>Resources Needed</th><th>By When</th><th>By Whom</th><th>Review Date and Who Reviews</th><th>Result of Review</th></tr>
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STANDARD 3 – TRUSTEES AND THE BOARD

Each RCC has a Board of Trustees that provides overall management for the organisation. The Board must ensure that the RCC meets all legal requirements and is a good employer. In particular, it is responsible for carrying out strategic planning and management. It must decide on the overall direction for the RCC and evaluate the progress made towards aims and objectives. Most Boards delegate some of their responsibilities to Committees – these must have clear terms of reference.

Practical support must be offered to the senior manager within the RCC and accountability to funders must be ensured.

Level 1 – Basic Requirements

1. The Board agrees an annual budget and ensures that legal, financial and other requirements are met e.g. Inland Revenue, Customs & Excise, Charity Commission, auditing, SORP.   This should include a consideration of the main risks to which the Charity could be exposed e.g. governance & management, reputational, operational, finance, environmental and external, law and regulation compliance risks. (C)

2. Trustees ensure that the Board is constituted in accordance with the governing document (C) (L)

3. The Board complies with legal obligations in relation to SORP, in particular to produce annual accounts and a report which includes an explanation of what the charity has done for the public benefit during the year and a report on the achievements relating to its charitable purpose (C) (L)

4. The Board discusses, agrees and regularly reviews the mission, values, aims and objectives (C)

5. The Board reviews the match between the charitable purposes and the organisation's activities (C)

6. The Board sets the strategic direction for the RCC and agrees the annual business plan

7. Support is provided by the Board to the Chief Executive/Director

8. The Board receives regular reports on performance, both financial and non-financial, and reviews performance at each Board meeting

9. Each Trustee has a role description and a Trustee handbook, and there is an induction procedure for new Trustees

10. The organisation requires all trustees to formally confirm that they are eligible to serve as a trustee (e.g. Declaration forms) and undertakes CRB checks if appropriate (C) (L)

11. The Board ensures that individual trustees understand they must act only in the charity's interests, and that any conflicts of interest are identified and managed. (C) (L)

12. The Board ensures the implementation of policies and procedures that protect vulnerable beneficiaries from abuse, as required (C) (L)

Level 2 – Advanced Requirements

1. Trustees regularly review the governing document (every 2-3 years), to ensure that it is up to date and that the trustees have the powers they need to achieve the charity's objects and manage its resources (C)

2. The Board uses reports on performance to improve what the RCC does and how it does it

3. Trustees represent the RCC on appropriate local, regional and national bodies, promoting the work of the RCC externally and taking opportunities to influence in order to better achieve the organisation's mission and purpose (C)

4. The Board ensures that the funding/financing strategy is implemented effectively

5. The Board considers the future sustainability of the organisation – balancing what is needed now with what will be needed in the future. It actively considers options relating to diversification and income generation, ensuring that funding strategies comply with good practice and ethical considerations (C)

6. The Board ensures that an appropriate range of policies is produced by the RCC

7. The Board involves all relevant stakeholders in setting the strategic direction for the RCC

8. Trustees represent (as far as practicable) the demographic nature of the community that they serve

9. The Board identifies the mix of skills, knowledge and experience necessary for the effective administration of the charity. It ensures that recruitment and appointment of new trustees provides adequate opportunities for re-assessing and achieving that mix. (C)

10. The size of the Board is regularly reviewed to ensure that it is large enough to include the required skills and experience, but small enough to allow effective discussion and decision making (C)

11. Board regularly reviews its structures, strategies, policies and procedures to ensure that they are adequate for the delivery of the charity's purposes and mission (C)

12. Committees with delegated responsibilities have clear terms of reference agreed by the Board

Level 3 – Continued Implementation and Improvement

1. The effective implementation of levels 1 and 2 is checked annually

2. The effectiveness of the operation of the Board is reviewed and improved at defined intervals

3.   Trustees and the Board : Self Assessment

Level 1 - Basic Requirements	Standard Met?		
	No	**Partly**	**Yes**
1. The Board agrees an annual budget and ensures that legal, financial and other requirements are met e.g. Inland Revenue, Customs & Excise, Charity Commission, auditing, SORP. This should include a consideration of the main risks to which the Charity could be exposed e.g. governance & management, reputational, operational, finance, environmental and external, law and regulation compliance risks. (C)			
2. Trustees ensure that the Board is constituted in accordance with the governing document (C) (L)			
3. The Board complies with legal obligations in relation to SORP, in particular to produce annual accounts and a report which includes an explanation of what the charity has done for the public benefit during the year and a report on the achievements relating to its charitable purpose (C) (L)			
4. The Board discusses, agrees and regularly reviews the mission, values, aims and objectives (C)			
5. The Board reviews the match between the charitable purposes and the organisation's activities (C)			
6. The Board sets the strategic direction for the RCC and agrees the annual business plan			
7. Support is provided by the Board to the Chief Executive/Director			
8. The Board receives regular reports on performance, both financial and non-financial, and reviews performance at each Board meeting			
9. Each Trustee has a role description and a Trustee handbook, and there is an induction procedure for new Trustees			
10. The organisation requires all trustees to formally confirm that they are eligible to serve as a trustee (e.g. Declaration forms) and undertakes CRB checks if appropriate (C) (L)			
11. The Board ensures that individual trustees understand they must act only in the charity's interests, and that any conflicts of interest are identified and managed. (C) (L)			
12. The Board ensures the implementation of policies and procedures that protect vulnerable beneficiaries from abuse, as required (C) (L)			

Level 2 - Advanced Requirements	Standard Met?		
	No	Partly	Yes
1. Trustees regularly review the governing document (every 2-3 years), to ensure that it is up to date and that the trustees have the powers they need to achieve the charity's objects and manage its resources (C)			
2. The Board uses reports on performance to improve what the RCC does and how it does it			
3. Trustees represent the RCC on appropriate local, regional and national bodies, promoting the work of the RCC externally and taking opportunities to influence in order to better achieve the organisation's mission and purpose (C)			
4. The Board ensures that the funding/financing strategy is implemented effectively			
5. The Board considers the future sustainability of the organisation – balancing what is needed now with what will be needed in the future. It actively considers options relating to diversification and income generation, ensuring that funding strategies comply with good practice and ethical considerations (C)			
6. The Board ensures that an appropriate range of policies is produced by the RCC			
7. The Board involves all relevant stakeholders in setting the strategic direction for the RCC			
8. Trustees represent (as far as practicable) the demographic nature of the community that they serve			
9. The Board identifies the mix of skills, knowledge and experience necessary for the effective administration of the charity. It ensures that recruitment and appointment of new trustees provides adequate opportunities for re-assessing and achieving that mix. (C)			
10. The size of the Board is regularly reviewed to ensure that it is large enough to include the required skills and experience, but small enough to allow effective discussion and decision making (C)			
11. The Board regularly reviews its structures, strategies, policies and procedures to ensure that they are adequate for the delivery of the charity's purposes and mission (C)			
12. Committees with delegated responsibilities have clear terms of reference agreed by the Board			

Level 3 - Continued Implementation and Improvement	Standard Met?		
	No	Partly	Yes
1. The effective implementation of levels 1 and 2 is checked annually			
2. The effectiveness of the operation of the Board is reviewed and improved at defined intervals			

Standard 3 - Trustees and the Board :   Action Plan

	TO BE DONE			CHECK IT WAS DONE	
Agreed Action	**Resources Needed**	**By When**	**By Whom**	**Review Date and Who Reviews**	**Result of Review**

STANDARD 4 – MANAGING ACTIVITIES

A typical RCC delivers many different types of services to its users. In order to make sure that you do this effectively and efficiently, you need to properly control all the internal processes (or activities) that relate to service delivery. These processes must be well managed, with clear procedures, responsibilities and targets. Staff and volunteers must know what to do and when. They must also have access to the right equipment for them to carry out their processes.

Level 1 – Basic Requirements

1. The management structure and individual responsibilities are clear

2. There are written procedures in place for all important activities: these define best practice for the RCC and are available to all staff and volunteers that need them

3. Trustees, staff and volunteers have access to the relevant information for them to carry out their job

4. The organisation identifies and complies with relevant legislation and takes professional advice where necessary (C) (L)

5. Specific, measurable and achievable targets are set for all important activities and staff are aware of them

6. The use of IT is well managed, with staff having adequate and suitable hardware and software to carry out their activities

7. Minutes are kept of all relevant meetings and circulated to those that need to know

Level 2 – Advanced Requirements

1. The written procedures for important activities are reviewed at pre-determined intervals

2. Effective internal communication processes (upwards, downwards and sideways) are in place

3. Records are well maintained, with data protection and confidentiality requirements being identified and met

4. A written purchasing procedure ensures that suppliers are chosen on the basis of best value and that they receive clear orders

5. The RCC has an environmental policy and the environmental impact of its activities is considered and minimised

6. Individual projects are well managed, including planning them, evaluating needs, providing resources, etc

Level 3 – Continued Implementation and Improvement

1. The effective implementation of levels 1 and 2 is checked annually

2. The effectiveness of the systems in place for managing activities are reviewed and improved at defined intervals

4. Managing Activities : Self Assessment

Level 1 - Basic Requirements	Standard Met?		
	No	Partly	Yes
1. The management structure and individual responsibilities are clear			
2. There are written procedures in place for all important activities: these define best practice for the RCC and are available to all staff and volunteers that need them			
3. Trustees, staff and volunteers have access to the relevant information for them to carry out their job			
4. The organisation identifies and complies with relevant legislation and takes professional advice where necessary (C) (L)			
5. Specific, measurable and achievable targets are set for all important activities and staff are aware of them			
6. The use of IT is well managed, with staff having adequate and suitable hardware and software to carry out their activities			
7. Minutes are kept of all relevant meetings and circulated to those that need to know			

Level 2 - Advanced Requirements	Standard Met?		
	No	Partly	Yes
1. The written procedures for important activities are reviewed at pre-determined intervals			
2. Effective internal communication processes (upwards, downwards and sideways) are in place			
3. Records are well maintained, with data protection and confidentiality requirements being identified and met			
4. A written purchasing procedure ensures that suppliers are chosen on the basis of best value and that they receive clear orders			
5. The RCC has an environmental policy and the environmental impact of its activities is considered and minimised			
6. Individual projects are well managed, including planning them, evaluating needs, providing resources, etc			

Level 3 - Continued Implementation and Improvement	Standard Met?		
	No	Partly	Yes
1. The effective implementation of levels 1 and 2 is checked annually			
2. The effectiveness of the systems in place for managing activities are reviewed and improved at defined intervals			

Standard 4 - Managing Activities : Action Plan

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TO BE DONE   **CHECK IT WAS DONE**

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Agreed Action	Resources Needed	By When	By Whom	Review Date and Who Reviews	Result of Review

STANDARD 5 – FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT AND ANNUAL REPORTING

Financial resources must be managed effectively and with due regard to ethical considerations. All external legal requirements must be met, and there must be relevant financial procedures in place. There must be appropriate financial delegation, segregation and controls in place.

Level 1 – Basic Requirements

1. The organisation identifies and complies with relevant legislation and takes professional advice where necessary (C) (L)

2. The RCC prepares its Annual Report & Accounts in accordance with good practice requirements, and fulfils the legal requirements for filing in a timely fashion (C) (L)

3. There are written procedures in place for financial control, including:

    a. Banking

    b. Expenses

    c. Petty cash

    d. Purchasing, including invoicing

    e. Credit control

4. There is the proper segregation of financial duties, such as ordering, signing cheques, etc

5. There is regular monitoring of expenditure and income against targets

6. There is a defined financial allocation for individual activities and projects
7. There is appropriate financial delegation with defined authorities for relevant staff

Level 2 – Advanced Requirements

1. The RCC structures its activities in a tax-efficient way (ensuring maximum rate relief) and minimizes the operational risk to the charity from trading activities (C)

2. Financial projections and cash flow analysis are used to manage finances effectively

3. There is a policy on the appropriate level of reserves and contingency measures for emergency expenditure

4. There is an appropriate funding strategy (or financing/ income generation strategy)

5. There is an internal financial audit programme which includes risk assessment

6. Financial resource allocations to projects and teams are reviewed in the light of changing service delivery

7. There is an adequate financial allocation for individual activities and projects

Level 3 – Continued Implementation and Improvement

1. The effective implementation of levels 1 and 2 is checked annually

2. The effectiveness of the financial management processes is reviewed and improved at defined intervals

5. Financial Management and Annual Reporting : Self Assessment

Level 1 - Basic Requirements	Standard Met?		
	No	Partly	Yes
1. The organisation identifies and complies with relevant legislation and takes professional advice where necessary (C) (L)			
2. The RCC prepares its Annual Report & Accounts in accordance with good practice requirements, and fulfils the legal requirements for filing in a timely fashion (C) (L)			
3. There are written procedures in place for financial control, including: banking; expenses; petty cash; purchasing (including invoicing); credit control			
4. There is the proper segregation of financial duties, such as ordering, signing cheques, etc			
5. There is regular monitoring of expenditure and income against targets			
6. There is a defined financial allocation for individual activities and projects			
7. There is appropriate financial delegation with defined authorities for relevant staff			

Level 2 - Advanced Requirements	Standard Met?		
	No	Partly	Yes
1. The RCC structures its activities in a tax-efficient way (ensuring maximum rate relief) and minimizes the operational risk to the charity from trading activities (C)			
2. Financial projections and cash flow analysis are used to manage finances effectively			
3. There is a policy on the appropriate level of reserves and contingency measures for emergency expenditure			
4. There is an appropriate funding strategy (or financing/ income generation strategy)			
5. There is an internal financial audit programme which includes risk assessment			
6. Financial resource allocations to projects and teams are reviewed in the light of changing service delivery			
7. There is an adequate financial allocation for individual activities and projects			

Level 3 - Continued Implementation and Improvement	Standard Met?		
	No	Partly	Yes
1. The effective implementation of levels 1 and 2 is checked annually			
2. The effectiveness of financial management processes is reviewed and improved at defined intervals			

Standard 5 - Financial Management and Annual Reporting : Action Plan

TO BE DONE   **CHECK IT WAS DONE**

Agreed Action	Resources Needed	By When	By Whom	Review Date and Who Reviews	Result of Review

STANDARD 6 – MONITORING AND EVALUATION

RCCs must understand how well they are performing. This information is obtained from monitoring and evaluation of performance, from both within and outside the RCC.

Having monitored and evaluated, this must then be fed back and used to improve either the types of services delivered or the processes by which those services are delivered.

Outcome measurement is an essential part of this process.

Level 1 – Basic Requirements

1. Regular monitoring of the key services provided to users is planned and undertaken

2. Monitoring involves all relevant stakeholders – staff, volunteers, Trustees, users and funders

3. Regular project evaluation is undertaken

4. The results of monitoring and evaluation are recorded and shared internally and with relevant stakeholders

5. Services provided are reviewed for accessibility and appropriateness for all users

Level 2 – Advanced Requirements

1. Monitoring and evaluation are used to improve planning and service delivery: action is taken on the results found, especially where targets or objectives are not met

2. Monitoring of outcome performance is undertaken

3. Analysis of trends in performance over time is undertaken

4. The performance of other RCCs is researched in order to identify, and where possible implement, better practice elsewhere

5. Monitoring of the implementation of the equal opportunities policy and/or procedures is undertaken

Level 3 – Continued Implementation and Improvement

1. The effective implementation of levels 1 and 2 is checked annually

2. The effectiveness of monitoring and evaluation is reviewed and improved at defined intervals

6. Monitoring and Evaluation : Self Assessment

Level 1 - Basic Requirements	Standard Met?		
	No	Partly	Yes
1. Regular monitoring of the key services provided to users is planned and undertaken			
2. Monitoring involves all relevant stakeholders – staff, volunteers, Trustees, users and funders			
3. Regular project evaluation is undertaken			
4. The results of monitoring and evaluation are recorded and shared internally and with relevant stakeholders			
5. Services provided are reviewed for accessibility and appropriateness for all users			

Level 2 - Advanced Requirements	Standard Met?		
	No	Partly	Yes
1. Monitoring and evaluation are used to improve planning and service delivery: action is taken on the results found, especially where targets or objectives are not met			
2. Monitoring of outcome performance is undertaken			
3. Analysis of trends in performance over time is undertaken			
4. The performance of other RCCs is researched in order to identify, and where possible implement, better practice elsewhere			
5. Monitoring of the implementation of the equal opportunities policy and procedures is undertaken			

Level 3 - Continued Implementation and Improvement	Standard Met?		
	No	Partly	Yes
1. The effective implementation of levels 1 and 2 is checked annually			
2. The effectiveness of monitoring and evaluation is reviewed and improved at defined intervals			

Standard 6 - Monitoring and Evaluation :   Action Plan

	TO BE DONE				CHECK IT WAS DONE
Agreed Action	**Resources Needed**	**By When**	**By Whom**	**Review Date and Who Reviews**	**Result of Review**

STANDARD 7 – MANAGING AND SUPPORTING STAFF AND VOLUNTEERS

'Staff' covers both <u>employees</u> (ie paid staff) and <u>volunteers</u> used by the RCC itself – that is, those for which the RCC has a legal or other responsibility. There must be an adequate number of suitable and appropriately trained staff to achieve your aims. They must be selected, inducted, supervised and supported in accordance with agreed procedures.

The needs of employees and volunteers are mostly similar – the methods used for meeting those needs have to be appropriate to these two groups however, and therefore may be different. Where there are different requirements for the two groups this is made explicit below by using the words 'employees' or 'volunteers' respectively.

The specific requirements in levels 1 and 2 below concerning volunteers only need to be addressed if the RCC actually uses, or plans to use, volunteers.

Level 1 – Basic Requirements

1. The organisation identifies and complies with relevant legislation and takes professional advice where necessary (C) (L)

2. There are written procedures for employee recruitment, induction, probation, expenses, redundancy, disciplinary, grievance and equal opportunities which meet all legal requirements

3. The special needs of volunteers are addressed: for example this should include a volunteer handbook; a volunteer policy; specific procedures for volunteers covering recruitment, expenses, disciplinary, grievance, equal opportunities, consultation and review of work; giving them information relating to the RCC; and specific relevant areas of work being made available to them

4. The health and safety needs of staff are properly dealt with, through a policy and written procedure and regular risk assessments

5. There is a clear line management structure

6. All employees have contracts and job descriptions, and these reflect actual responsibilities. All volunteers have role descriptions

7. All staff should receive regular and effective support and supervision and an annual appraisal; volunteers have their work and performance regularly reviewed

Level 2 – Advanced Requirements

1. The perceptions of staff are obtained on an on-going basis, for example by means of regular support and supervision, appraisals and staff meetings. The organisation should take all reasonable steps to address staff concerns.

2. Issues or concerns raised by staff should be dealt with by the line manager. Procedures must be put in place should a member of staff have issues with their own line manager.

3. Regular meetings are held of staff at appropriate times; with an opportunity for staff to request Agenda items and to input into the discussion or raise queries. Records of these meetings are taken and circulated

4. Employees are given clear objectives or targets for their work: they are aware of what these are and their performance against them is assessed. Volunteers must be clear about what their work involves and what they should be achieving.

5. The RCC responds quickly to expressions of interest from potential volunteers

6. The use of volunteers by the RCC is regularly reviewed: there is a clear understanding of the legal implications concerning the use of volunteers, such as benefits, allowances and regular payments

7. Staff are effectively involved in annual and strategic planning

Level 3 – Continued Implementation and Improvement

1. The effective implementation of levels 1 and 2 is checked annually

2. The effectiveness of processes for managing and supporting staff are reviewed and improved at defined intervals

7.   Managing & Supporting Staff and Volunteers : Self Assessment

Level 1 - Basic Requirements	Standard Met?		
	No	Partly	Yes
1. The organisation identifies and complies with relevant legislation and takes professional advice where necessary (C) (L)			
2. There are written procedures for employee recruitment, induction, probation, expenses, redundancy, disciplinary, grievance and equal opportunities which meet all legal requirements			
3. The special needs of volunteers are addressed: for example this should include a volunteer handbook; a volunteer policy; specific procedures for volunteers covering recruitment, expenses, disciplinary, grievance, equal opportunities, consultation and review of work; giving them information relating to the RCC; and specific relevant areas of work being made available to them			
4. The health and safety needs of staff are properly dealt with, through a policy and written procedure and regular risk assessments			
5. There is a clear line management structure			
6. All employees have contracts and job descriptions, and these reflect actual responsibilities. All volunteers have role descriptions			
7. All staff should receive regular and effective support and supervision and an annual appraisal; volunteers have their work and performance regularly reviewed			

Level 2 - Advanced Requirements	Standard Met?		
	No	Partly	Yes
1. The perceptions of staff are obtained on an on-going basis, for example by means of regular support and supervision, appraisals and staff meetings. The organisation should take all reasonable steps to address staff concerns.			
2. Issues or concerns raised by staff should be dealt with by the line manager. Procedures must be put in place should a member of staff have issues with their own line manager.			
3. Regular meetings are held of staff at appropriate times; with an opportunity for staff to request Agenda items and to input into the discussion or raise queries. Records of these meetings are taken and circulated			

		Standard Met?		
4.	Employees are given clear objectives or targets for their work: they are aware of what these are and their performance against them is assessed. Volunteers must be clear about what their work involves and what they should be achieving.			
5.	The RCC responds quickly to expressions of interest from potential volunteers			
6.	The use of volunteers by the RCC is regularly reviewed: there is a clear understanding of the legal implications concerning the use of volunteers, such as benefits, allowances and regular payments			
7.	Staff are effectively involved in annual and strategic planning			

Level 3 - Continued Implementation and Improvement	Standard Met?		
	No	Partly	Yes
1. The effective implementation of levels 1 and 2 is checked annually			
2. The effectiveness of processes for managing and supporting staff are reviewed and improved at defined intervals			

Standard 7 - Managing and Supporting Staff and Volunteers : Action Plan

	TO BE DONE			CHECK IT WAS DONE	
Agreed Action	**Resources Needed**	**By When**	**By Whom**	**Review Date and Who Reviews**	**Result of Review**

STANDARD 8 – TRAINING AND SKILLS DEVELOPMENT

All people within the RCC – paid staff, Trustees and other volunteers – must have the appropriate skills and competencies to carry out their functions. Trustees have special needs, and the requirements in Levels 1 and 2 should be interpreted appropriately in the context of those needs.

This means identifying the competencies required for each post and providing training or other methods of improving the skills of people so that they have the required competencies. An adequate training budget must be identified. People should have an individual training and development plan, or a similar document that identifies what training/development needs they have and how these needs will be met.

Level 1 – Basic Requirements

1. There is a written procedure for people development, including training

2. The training needs of people are regularly identified and agreed, there is an adequate budget to meet the agreed needs and external training opportunities are circulated internally

3. Records of training are kept

4. People are given the opportunity to attend conferences and other events in order to increase their skills

5. All people receive training in core agreed areas, such as equal opportunities, health and safety, etc

Level 2 – Advanced Requirements

1. The competencies required for each post are identified

2. The effectiveness of training is analysed

3. There is an organisational training plan

4. People have their own training and development plans (or a similar document), which are linked to the organisational training plan and the competencies required for their post

5. The skills of people to deal with new areas of work are properly developed, for example through training

6. Where relevant, people have achieved or are working towards a relevant recognised qualification

Level 3 – Continued Implementation and Improvement

1. The effective implementation of levels 1 and 2 is checked annually

2. The effectiveness of training and skills development is reviewed and improved at defined intervals

8.   Training and Skills Development : Self Assessment

Level 1 - Basic Requirements	Standard Met?		
	No	**Partly**	**Yes**
1. There is a written procedure for people development, including training			
2. The training needs of people are regularly identified and agreed, there is an adequate budget to meet the agreed needs and external training opportunities are circulated internally			
3. Records of training are kept			
4. People are given the opportunity to attend conferences and other events in order to increase their skills			
5. All people receive training in core agreed areas, such as equal opportunities, health and safety, etc			

Level 2 - Advanced Requirements	Standard Met?		
	No	**Partly**	**Yes**
1. The competencies required for each post are identified			
2. The effectiveness of training is analysed			
3. There is an organisational training plan			
4. People have their own training and development plans (or a similar document), which are linked to the organisational training plan and the competencies required for their post			
5. The skills of people to deal with new areas of work are properly developed, for example through training			
6. Where relevant, people have achieved or are working towards a relevant recognised qualification			

Level 3 - Continued Implementation and Improvement	Standard Met?		
	No	**Partly**	**Yes**
1. The effective implementation of levels 1 and 2 is checked annually			
2. The effectiveness of training and skills development is reviewed and improved at defined intervals			

Standard 8 - Training and Skills Development :   Action Plan

TO BE DONE   **CHECK IT WAS DONE**

Agreed Action	Resources Needed	By When	By Whom	Review Date and Who Reviews	Result of Review

STANDARD 9 – NETWORKS AND PARTNERSHIPS

The RCC should be an integral part of the local community, working well with other key organisations to achieve shared objectives. This means identifying who you should form partnerships with, your shared and different needs, and how you will work together.

You will also want to have more informal networking arrangements with a large number of national, regional or local organisations.

An important part of the above is sharing and learning good practice from and with other organisations.

Level 1 – Basic Requirements

1. Information about the services provided by the RCC is produced and made available to other organisations

2. Key partner organisations are identified and informal working relationships established with them

3. The Board considers whether collaborations and partnerships with other organisations could improve its services and benefit users (C)

4. The organisation is independent and pursues its own purposes - not those of any other body (C) (L)

5. Networking and partnerships are used to raise local awareness of rural issues effectively

6. Networking by staff at all levels is encouraged

7. Regular meetings take place with key contacts and partners

Level 2 – Advanced Requirements

1. The RCC collaborates with others in RCAN and shares good practice with them. (C)

2. The RCC uses opportunities to influence in order to better achieve its mission and purpose (C)

3. There is a comprehensive range of publicity materials available covering all of the RCCs important services: these use appropriate language and contain positive images which promote diversity

4. There are formal partnership agreements with key organisations which are regularly reviewed

5. Contact details of all relevant local and national organisations are held and kept up to date

6. Best practice in other organisations is identified and, where relevant, used to improve the performance of the RCC

Level 3 – Continued Implementation and Improvement

1. The effective implementation of levels 1 and 2 is checked annually

2. The effectiveness of networking and partnership arrangements are reviewed and improved at defined intervals

9.   Networks & Partnerships : Self Assessment

Level 1 - Basic Requirements	Standard Met?		
	No	Partly	Yes
1. Information about the services provided by the RCC is produced and made available to other organisations			
2. Key partner organisations are identified and informal working relationships established with them			
3. The Board considers whether collaborations and partnerships with other organisations could improve its services and benefit users (C)			
4. The organisation is independent and pursues its own purposes - not those of any other body (C) (L)			
5. Networking and partnerships are used to raise local awareness of rural issues effectively			
6. Networking by staff at all levels is encouraged			
7. Regular meetings take place with key contacts and partners			

Level 2 - Advanced Requirements	Standard Met?		
	No	Partly	Yes
1. The RCC collaborates with others in RCAN and shares good practice with them. (C)			
2. The RCC uses opportunities to influence in order to better achieve its mission and purpose (C)			
3. There is a comprehensive range of publicity materials available covering all of the RCCs important services: these use appropriate language and contain positive images which promote diversity			
4. There are formal partnership agreements with key organisations which are regularly reviewed			
5. Contact details of all relevant local and national organisations are held and kept up to date			
6. Best practice in other organisations is identified and, where relevant, used to improve the performance of the RCC			

Level 3 - Continued Implementation and Improvement	Standard Met?		
	No	Partly	Yes
1. The effective implementation of levels 1 and 2 is checked annually			
2. The effectiveness of networking and partnership arrangements are reviewed and improved at defined intervals			

Standard 9 - Networks and Partnerships :   Action Plan

	TO BE DONE			CHECK IT WAS DONE	
Agreed Action	**Resources Needed**	**By When**	**By Whom**	**Review Date and Who Reviews**	**Result of Review**

ANNEX 1 : List of Key Documents Required by the Standard

DOCUMENTS FOR LEVEL 1	REQUIREMENT (Standard)
Mission, vision, values, aims and objectives	1
Annual business plan, including output targets	1
Minutes to show the mission and organisational strategies are regularly reviewed	1
Complaints policy and procedure	2
Trustees' Annual Report and Accounts document	3
Organisational Risk Analysis document and management plan	3
Trustee role descriptions, handbook and induction procedure	3
Completed declaration forms of trustees' eligibility to serve	3
Completed trustees' conflict of interest declarations	3
Minutes, etc., to show that the charitable purposes have been reviewed and are linked to activities; that the mission, values, aims and objectives have been reviewed and agreed; that organisational strategies have been reviewed	1, 2 &3
Written procedures for all important activities	4
Minutes of meetings - Board, Committees, Management Team, staff	4
Financial procedures (banking, expenses, petty cash, purchasing, credit control)	5
Results of monitoring of key services and project evaluation	6
HR policies and procedures (recruitment, induction, probation, expenses, redundancy, disciplinary, grievance, equal opportunities)	7
Organisation Chart	7
Health and safety policy and procedure	7
Staff employment contract and job descriptions/role descriptions	7
Volunteer handbook, policy and procedures (if you have volunteers)	7
Training & Development policy and procedure	8
Records of training	8
Information about the services provided	9

ADDITIONAL DOCUMENTS FOR LEVEL 2	REQUIREMENT (Standard)
Medium term business plan	1
Outcome measures and outcomes for key services	1
Documentary evidence that demonstrates public benefit reporting	2
Sustainable funding/financing strategy	3 & 5
Organisational policies (including staff handbook contents)	3
Results of Trustee Skills Audits	3
Minutes to show that the Board has reviewed its size and available skills, its structures and strategies	3
Terms of Reference for the Board and its Committees	3
Schedule for reviewing policies and procedures	4
Data Protection Policy and procedures (or guidelines for staff)	4
Purchasing procedure	4
Environmental policy and procedures or guidelines for staff	4
Reserves policy	5
Internal financial audit programme	5
Results of monitoring of outcomes	6
Records of staff meetings	7
Bullying & Harassment or Dignity at Work policy and procedure	7
Organisational training plan	8
Individual training and development plans (or similar)	8
Publicity materials – including Annual Review	9
Partnership agreements	9
Contact details of other organisations	9

ANNEX 2 : Definitions of Terms used

Aims and Objectives
Aims usually describe the intended benefits or changes that you expect to make – they do not specify exact details of what and when.

Objectives identify what you will do and the services that you will provide – they usually describe the activities by which you will achieve your aims.

Annual Review/Report
A promotional report that gives information about the past year's performance of the RCC.

Business Plan
A strategic document that describes in outline for a period of time (such as one or three years) what the RCC will be doing, how and when in support of its aims and objectives. It may include, or reference, a work plan that describes in more detail these issues, particularly at individual project level.

Mission
A mission is a statement that describes the purpose or "raison d'être" of the RCC. It describes why the RCC exists.

Outcomes
The changes or benefits that take place as a result of your activities – these usually relate to your aims.

Outputs
The work generated or things done by the RCC – they usually relate to your objectives.

Partnership
A working relationship between two or more parties creating added value for the user/customer.

Policy
A document that provides an overview and statement of principles in an area like health and safety.

The Standard requires an 'appropriate' range of policies to be produced by the RCC. What is appropriate will depend on the size of the RCC and the scope of its activities. There should be a sufficient coverage of policies to ensure that important areas of work function effectively. It should be noted that the Standard also specifically requires policies in a number of areas, such as for volunteers and reserves.

Procedure
A description of the important steps in a process or things that the RCC does. Usually written down, but can be in any form eg text, flowchart, checklist, available electronically, etc.

The Standard requires written procedures for all 'important' activities. Important activities are those that relate to the key objectives of the RCC. It should be noted that the Standard also specifically requires procedures in a number of areas, such as for financial and human resource issues.

In addition, the revised Operational Standards will define areas where written procedures are required, and they will be linked to the requirement in Standard 4 when they are published.

Process
A way of working or an activity that converts information, knowledge or materials into a service, benefit or product.

Stakeholder
Anyone who has a direct interest in the RCC and what it does. It includes customers, users, employees, the local community, funders, Trustees, etc.

Strategy
A strategy is the way the RCC implements its mission, aims and objectives, based on the needs of major stakeholders, and supported by relevant policies, plans, objectives, targets and processes.

Targets
Targets should be SMART – Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic and Time-based

Training & Development Plans
These are plans for individual staff that describe what developmental and training needs they require in order to provide them with the right skills for their job – they can be very simple in the case of volunteers.

User
An individual or organisation that receives a service from an RCC, is external to the RCC, and may or may not pay for it.

Values
Values are the understandings and expectations that describe how staff behave and upon which relationships are based (eg trust, support and truth).