

# **SUKKAT SHALOM**

## **EDINBURGH LIBERAL JEWISH COMMUNITY**

Sukkat Shalom, Edinburgh Liberal Jewish Community, was founded in March 2004 and we became affiliated to Liberal Judaism ([www.liberaljudaism.org](http://www.liberaljudaism.org)) in September 2004. As described on its website, Liberal Judaism is an authentic and modern form of Judaism, rooted in a deep and meaningful engagement with Jewish texts, values, culture and history. We are proud to be part of the Liberal Judaism movement.

At the time of writing (February 2024) we have 147 adult members, 23 associate members and 63 children. We hold regular erev Shabbat and Shabbat services, we have discussion groups, a cheder (religion school) and an 'Exploring Judaism' class for those wishing to learn more about Judaism, often with a view to conversion. More details of all these activities are described in the following pages.

We are exceedingly fortunate to have Rabbi Mark Solomon as our Rabbi. Rabbi Mark lives in London and under normal circumstances visits us once a month. In addition to serving as our part-time Rabbi, Mark is also the Rabbi for the Leicester Liberal Jewish Community, is the Liberal Judaism Interfaith consultant and lectures at the Leo Baeck college, the Rabbinic training college for Progressive Jewish Rabbis.

We are always looking to involve more of our members in the running of our community. Members of Council (our governing body) are aware that it can sometimes feel daunting to volunteer to help. Please do so! The more of us who are involved, the better for all of us, as individual members and for the overall health of our community. As Rabbi Tarfon said, "You are not required to complete the task, but neither are you at liberty to abstain from it".

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## ORGANISATION

Sukkat Shalom is a Scottish Charitable Incorporated Organisation (SCIO, no. SC035678) and the business of the community is run by our Council, who are also the trustees of the community. Members of Council are elected at our AGM and details of current Council members can be found in the [organisation section of our website](#). A document describing the expectations of Council members can also be found [on the website](#).

Minutes of Council meetings and AGMs can also be found in the organisation section of the website, as can our community's [constitution](#). (Some areas of our website require a password, which can be requested by emailing [webmaster@eljc.org](mailto:webmaster@eljc.org).)

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## OUR AIM AND VALUES

[Our aim and values](#) can be found on our website. They are copied below:

### Our aim

Our aim is to sustain our community and continue its development through the provision of services and activities which embody our values and Liberal Jewish identity and which embrace the wide diversity of our members' faith, practice and support needs.

### Our values

- We provide a modern and relevant interpretation of Jewish life and practice and we respect and embrace the diverse ways in which people express their Judaism and engage with it
- We are warm and welcoming and offer a friendly hand to all those who want to share in Jewish companionship, worship and study
- We particularly value difference and pride ourselves in embracing diversity in gender, race, age, sexual orientation and ability / disability. We are as welcoming to single people as we are to couples and families
- We nurture and support those within our community who are vulnerable or in need of help and we endeavour to ensure that financial circumstances are never a barrier to full participation
- We are committed to the pursuit of peace, social justice and care for the environment
- We seek to play a positive role within wider society and the world at large

- We welcome non-Jewish partners at our services and events and embrace them as part of our social network
- We commit ourselves to building our community through mutual respect, regardless of our differences

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## MEMBERSHIP

To be a full member of our community you have to be recognised as Jewish according to Liberal Judaism. Liberal Judaism recognises anyone as Jewish where either parent is Jewish and the person has been brought up as Jewish, as well as where someone has converted to Judaism.

We also have Associate membership. This is open to anyone who is not Jewish but would like to be formally associated with our community, be that a partner of a member, someone who is converting, or someone who just wishes to show their support for our community. Associate membership status was formally agreed at the 2019 AGM, and details of the formal resolution which explains more details of Associate membership are in the [appendix](#).

We have a membership fee which is agreed each year at our AGM. At the time of writing (February 2024) it is £260 per person. The Associate membership fee is half that of the full membership. However **one of our founding principles was that we would never refuse membership to anyone on the basis of the membership fee** and a confidential discussion with our Treasurer has always meant that a mutually acceptable agreement can be reached to ensure that anyone who wishes to become a member can do so.

We also have a reduced rate for those on certain benefits and a reduced rate for students who wish to formally join our community.

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## **SAFEGUARDING**

Sukkat Shalom recognises that the welfare of all its members and visitors is paramount, and that all persons have the right to protection from all types of harm or abuse. We have a formal Safeguarding policy on these welfare concerns; the policy contains an appendix which gives details of how the policy is applied. [The current version of the Safeguarding policy](#) can be found on our website. There is a direct link to the policy in the website index.

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## **FROM CRADLE TO GRAVE**

As a community we celebrate all life-cycle events:

### **Birth**

A naming ceremony for a new baby is a very moving family occasion and we are happy to arrange this on members' behalf. We can also assist with putting you in touch with a professionally qualified Progressive mohel who can perform a brit millah.

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### **Bar/Bat/B'nei Mitzvah**

Preparation for a bar/bat/b'nei mitzvah is a big commitment to Jewish learning for the young person and their family. Prospective b'nei mitzvah are expected to have attended cheder for the preceding years but as the date approaches extra support will be needed. This will consist of sessions with the Rabbi, be that during his visits or via Zoom, as well as support from parents or from other members who will help the young person to conduct part of the service on the big day.

We are also happy to provide similar support to adults who, for whatever reason, did not have such an event at the usual age.

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## Marriage & Civil Partnership

Our Rabbi, Mark Solomon, can conduct Jewish marriages and, at the same time as conducting the Jewish marriage ceremony, he is authorised in Scotland to register the couple in a civil marriage. In order for Rabbi Mark to officiate, both partners must be Jewish. For the avoidance of doubt, Rabbi Mark is able to conduct both opposite-sex and same-sex Jewish marriages and to register both opposite-sex and same-sex civil marriages.

To date, Rabbi Mark hasn't been asked to register a civil partnership at the same time as conducting a religious marriage, but this is also possible too. Further details of the legal aspects of this are contained in the [appendix](#).

Where only one partner is Jewish, Rabbi Mark may be willing to participate in a mixed faith marriage blessing, but this will need to be preceded by a civil wedding (which can't be conducted by Rabbi Mark). Community lay readers are also happy to conduct a mixed faith marriage blessing.

Where Rabbi Mark officiates at a wedding or mixed faith blessing, members make an individual arrangement with him as regards his fees and other expenses. Rabbi Mark can also officiate at ceremonies for non-members.

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## Funerals

We can provide both burial and cremation services for members. We are able to assist with all the necessary arrangements and we have a formal arrangement with William Purves Funeral Directors, who we would recommend as the funeral director of choice. William Purves offer a reduced rate for funerals arranged through our community. We may also be able to help with the ritual of taharah (ritual washing).

We have reserved plots in the new part of the beautiful Dean cemetery (the section with an entrance just off Queensferry Road and Dean Path). These plots can also be used for the burial of ashes following a funeral service at the crematorium.

Arrangements can be made for members of the same family to be interred in the same plot or an adjacent plot, and a non-Jewish partner can be buried in the same plot as a member. While we have not been asked to conduct a woodland burial, there are woodland burial sites in and around Edinburgh and we would be able to officiate at a woodland burial.

We also try, where possible, to assist with the funeral arrangements of (Jewish) non-members.

Details of funeral arrangements, including appropriate fees, are in the [appendix](#).

Should you wish to speak to someone about funeral arrangements, please e-mail [burials@eljic.org](mailto:burials@eljic.org) or leave a message on the community 'phone (0131 777 8024). [click here to return to contents page](#)

## SERVICES

Our services are a mixture of in-person, Zoom and hybrid services. In-person and Zoom services are led by Rabbi Mark or lay readers, while hybrid services (services that are conducted in-person but also broadcast on Zoom) are only led by Rabbi Mark. Service times vary for erev/kabbalat Shabbat services (they can be at 6pm, 6.30pm, 7pm and on occasion 8pm) while Shabbat services are at 11am. We also have Havdalah services to mark the end of Shabbat, and festival services. Details of all our services are published in the various reminders sent out to members, and [details are also on the website](#).

Our in-person services are at one of the two venues we use for these services, Marchmont St Giles church centre (1A Kilgraston Road, Edinburgh EH9 1TZ) and St Mark's Unitarian church (7 Castle Terrace, Edinburgh EH1 2DP).

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## **WELFARE**

Should anyone need help, please either send an e-mail to our general email, [contact@eljc.org](mailto:contact@eljc.org) or leave a message on the community phone (0131 777 8024). While we have limited resources, we will always do our best to help and have links to e.g., Jewish Care who may also be able to offer assistance. Rabbi Mark can also make welfare visits on his visits to Edinburgh (depending on his schedule) and speak with members via 'phone calls.

We also have a general WhatsApp support group which offers mutual advice and assistance between members.

Further details of how we help each other are in the Welfare section of the [appendix](#).

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## **CHEDER (Religion School)**

We have an active cheder which meets on a Saturday morning roughly every two weeks during the school year. The cheder is run by two senior teachers and supported by an enthusiastic group of teachers. Children of members and Associate members from P1 to bar/bat mitzvah age are welcome. Details of classes are communicated to cheder parents. The principles on which cheder is run are detailed in the [appendix](#).

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## ADULT EDUCATION

During his time as our Rabbi, Rabbi Mark has always held adult education classes. We currently hold “Tea & Talmud” and “Philosophy” discussion groups. Full details of all classes are in our newsletter and reminders, which are sent to both members and non-members who sign up to our mailing list.

Many of our members join education programmes run by the Ark synagogue ([www.arksynagogue.org](http://www.arksynagogue.org)).

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## JEWISH STATUS AND CONVERSION TO JUDAISM

“Judaism is not transmitted genetically but culturally and within families through example and influence. The process of transmission is one of education in the broadest sense, so that what is transmitted is not merely knowledge but beliefs and values, attitudes and ideals, and above all a sense of identification and commitment.” (From the document “Liberal Judaism and Jewish Identity”, 2005. This is one of a series of pamphlets from the Rabbinic Conference of Liberal Judaism, published by Liberal Judaism as part of its “Liberal Judaism in Practice” series.)

We have an active conversion class run by Rabbi Mark. The process for conversion to Judaism normally takes at least one year and typically up to two years. During this time those wishing to convert are expected to attend the ‘Exploring Judaism’ classes run by Rabbi Mark, to attend Shabbat and festival services and to become involved in our community.

The formal conversion process is overseen by Liberal Judaism, and full details of the process and much other associated information can be found on the Liberal Judaism website ([www.liberaljudaism.org](http://www.liberaljudaism.org)). Once a person has attended the Exploring Judaism classes for some time and registered their intention to convert with Liberal Judaism, Rabbi Mark will ask them to take out Associate Membership by completing a form that can be obtained by e-mailing [membership@eljc.org](mailto:membership@eljc.org).

In January 2022 we produced a summary of the process which we give to those interested in converting. A copy of this is in the [appendix](#).

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## OTHER GENERAL INFORMATION

### Communications

Sukkat Shalom has a website ([www.eljc.org/](http://www.eljc.org/)), is on Facebook (<https://www.facebook.com/Sukkat-Shalom-Edinburgh-409490615745959/>), Instagram ([https://www.instagram.com/sukkatshalom\\_edi/](https://www.instagram.com/sukkatshalom_edi/)) and has a twitter account (<https://twitter.com/SukkatShalom>). You're encouraged to use and contribute to all of them.

There's information about many of the topics in this Directory on the website, and information on current services and events. There are also other sections such as 'Jewish Edinburgh and Scotland', archived newsletters and records of Council meetings. You do need to be registered to access some parts of the website; registration is free to all members of the community.

Our newsletter team produces a weekly email 'reminder' of current information and events. Our newsletter, Etrog, ordinarily goes out by email every two months (a print version is available on request), although at the time of writing we have had to suspend its publication.

### Library

We have a small library which is at St Mark's church. Members are welcome to borrow books from the library.

### Data Protection

Our 'privacy notice' details how we handle members' data and our approach to data protection. The privacy notice is on the website ([link to our privacy notice](#)).

### Contacting us

If you wish to contact us, please either send an e-mail to [contact@eljc.org](mailto:contact@eljc.org) or leave a message on the community phone (0131 777 8024). We also have a number of specific e-mail addresses, as below:

Chair – [chair@eljc.org](mailto:chair@eljc.org)

Treasurer – [treasurer@eljc.org](mailto:treasurer@eljc.org)

Council members – [council@eljc.org](mailto:council@eljc.org)

Secretary – [secretary@eljc.org](mailto:secretary@eljc.org)

Cheder head teacher – [cheder@eljc.org](mailto:cheder@eljc.org)

Funeral enquiries – [burials@eljc.org](mailto:burials@eljc.org)

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## SUKKAT SHALOM AND ISRAEL PALESTINE

As is the case in many Liberal Jewish communities, members of our community hold differing but equally strong views about Israel Palestine and about the role of British diaspora Jews with regard to it. We are strongly committed to avoiding conflict and division within our community but would also like to be able to achieve mutually respectful, honest discussion of difficult topics which are too important to ignore. The following is taken from the section “Where we stand on the Middle East” on the “Our Values” page of our website:

[The Sukkat Shalom position] on Israel [is the one] that has led to the most discussion and where people have expressed the most divergent views. Some members simply wish us to say that we support the State of Israel. Others urge that we include a statement in support of the rights for Palestinians and Arab Israelis as a first principle in our engagement with the Israeli State. ... Nevertheless we commit ourselves to building our community through mutual respect, regardless of our differences.

At this current time, it is even more important that we maintain these principles.

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## APPENDIX

### ASSOCIATE MEMBERSHIP

The membership category of Associate Membership was formally approved at the AGM held on 17<sup>th</sup> February 2019. The resolution passed at the meeting was as follows:

(1) 'Associate status' shall be established from the date of this resolution subject to the restrictions noted in 7A and shall be subject to the additional requirements below.

(2) The rights granted to those with associate status shall be all the rights enjoyed by members except the right to vote in general meetings, be elected to the council, or to receive certain religious services identified by the Council where such a person is otherwise ineligible to receive them for religious reasons.

(3) An ordinary annual subscription for 'associate status' shall be payable set at a rate of one-half of the sum payable by members.

(4) (a) Associate status shall be mandatory for those participating in the Exploring Judaism programme.

(b) The annual subscription for associate status shall be waived for a period not exceeding 24 months from the date the person is or was admitted to the programme.

(5) The right of the Council to regulate admission to associate status shall be identical to that laid out in the constitution for membership at 10-12.

(6) The power of the Honorary Treasurer or the Chairman noted in the constitution at 17 to accept from new or existing members a lower annual subscription on the terms that such a reduction shall be reviewed on an annual basis shall extend to those being admitted to or those with existing associate status.

(7) That the process established in the constitution at 21 for the expulsion of a member shall be applied identically to those people who have been admitted to associate status.

[\(click here to return to Membership section in the main section\)](#)

## MARRIAGE & CIVIL PARTNERSHIP

The law in Scotland (which is different to that in England) is such that it is the Rabbi who registers that a couple are married according to civil law at the same time as a religious marriage ceremony is undertaken. It is not mandatory that a civil marriage, or partnership, is registered at the same time as a religious ceremony.

The law regarding opposite-sex marriage has been in place for many years and Rabbi Mark has long been authorised to register such civil marriages. In 2022 Rabbi Mark conducted the first same-sex Jewish marriage in Scotland and he is now also authorised to register opposite-sex civil marriages.

It is also possible for civil partnerships to be registered according to civil law at the same time as a religious marriage ceremony is conducted. We have not, to date, been asked to do this but Rabbi Mark is also authorised to register civil partnerships.

The authorisation process that allows Rabbis to register civil marriages and partnerships is overseen by the Scottish Council of Jewish Communities (SCoJeC).

[\*\(click here to return to marriage and civil partnership section in the main document\)\*](#)

## FUNERALS

Because we are a small community we do not operate a burial insurance scheme included in the synagogue subscription. As such the cost of a funeral, cemetery fees etc. are met by the estate of the deceased.

The Rabbi is paid the standard Liberal Judaism rate for conducting a funeral. The Rabbi is also paid travel expenses for conducting a funeral unless the Rabbi is already in Edinburgh. These costs, which apply to members and non-members alike, are invoiced by the Rabbi to the Funeral Director who then recovers them from the estate of the deceased.

Where we are asked to conduct the funeral of a Jewish non-member, a fee equivalent to two years' membership is charged in addition to the fees above.

[\*\(click here to return to funerals section in the main document\)\*](#)

## WELFARE

We have a variety of ways in which we help each other. Where we are contacted directly by members we will do our best to help. Rabbi Mark is able to have confidential discussions with members, and there are formal and informal ways that members keep in touch with each other. These are detailed in the table below.

What do we have / do?	More details
Keeping in touch – WhatsApp group	This is a group that any member who wants to sign up to can do so. It is a forum for general chat and also a self-help group, where members ask for help they may need e.g., shopping, advice on tradespeople etc. etc.
Help from Rabbi Mark	Rabbi Mark is available for members to contact him as required. Rabbi Mark's contact details (phone and e-mail) are published in our reminders and in Etrog, our newsletter
Council taking the lead on specific items	This doesn't happen very often but, for example, Council members between them contacted all members on several occasions during the covid pandemic to see if there was any help the community could provide
Access to Jewish Care	We have contact with Jewish Care who are available to provide members with specialist help / advice
Our general help line (e-mail and phone)	Our general help line is there for members (or indeed non-members) to contact us about anything, including requests for help / support. The Care team email is specifically there for requests to the Care Team
Informal member to member contact	It is important not to forget that many of our members help each other on an individual basis

[\(click here to return to welfare section in the main document\)](#)

## CHEDER PRINCIPLES

The following was adopted by the Sukkat Shalom Council at its meeting on 13<sup>th</sup> December 2018:

Edinburgh Liberal Jewish Community runs a religion school (cheder) according to the following principles:

- There will be up to two Senior Teacher who are responsible for running the Cheder sessions, and for the welfare and safety of the children and other teachers. One of them will act as Lead Senior Teacher, being the first point of contact for all inquiries and questions concerning Cheder from within and outside of the Community, and for liaising with the Council. If neither of these teachers are members of Council, and no other teacher in Cheder is either, one of these teachers may be co-opted onto Council
- The Senior Teachers are responsible to the Council, via the Chair of the community. Any concerns, issues etc. that the Senior Teachers have are discussed in the first instance with the Chair
- All teachers have to be 'disclosed' and operate in accord with the Safeguarding policy
- Any concerns that a parent has with the running of the cheder are discussed in the first instance with the Lead Senior Teacher
- Only children of Edinburgh Liberal Jewish Community members, or those actively participating in the Exploring Judaism (conversion) class, are permitted to attend cheder
- The main focus of the curriculum taught to all children is Prayer Book/Synagogue Hebrew and Judaism– i.e., the study of Jewish practice, Torah, festivals, traditions etc.

[\(click here to return to cheder section in the main document\)](#)

## JEWISH STATUS AND CONVERSION TO JUDAISM

The document below was produced in January 2022 to help those thinking about converting to Judaism with Sukkat Shalom.

### Procedures in relation to people interested in conversion to Judaism

Sukkat Shalom

Edinburgh January 2022

As a Liberal Jewish congregation our prospective converts follow the procedures set out by Liberal Judaism (LJ) see [here](#) and in more detail in this [leaflet](#). These notes are intended as information for people interested in conversion and also for members of Sukkat Shalom, who may be acting as “buddies” for prospective converts.

### First steps

The prospective convert should be given information about us and about Judaism, and encouraged to read the information on the LJ web site. At this stage we would expect them to attend services and other cultural and social events at Sukkat Shalom. They would also be encouraged to get their own copy of the prayer book *Siddur Lev Chadash*. An introductory interview with our rabbi (Mark Solomon) would then be scheduled at one of his visits to Edinburgh or via zoom.

The rabbi will then advise the prospective convert about the next steps and provide them with advice, suggestions and further study material, if appropriate. This might involve attending the exploring Judaism classes that he holds weekly on zoom or in person on his visits to Edinburgh.

### Registration

The next stage is to apply formally for conversion by completing the form G1A along with their intended sponsoring rabbi (Mark Solomon again) and G1B for their own statement. It should be made clear to the prospective convert that they can decide when they are ready to proceed to this. In the case of people who have had no previous encounters with organised Judaism we would not expect to receive an application until they had attended several Sukkat Shalom events and this would normally be over a period of around 3 months. If the rabbi accepts the applicant they are registered as converts with Liberal Judaism, at the Montagu Centre to whom the forms are sent.

On submission of forms G1A and B to the Montagu Centre, proselytes receive a letter requesting payment, normally half at that time and half upon completion, but other arrangements are possible, as are reductions in case of hardship, e.g., for students or those on low incomes. Fees are currently £520 and £320 for confirmation of Jewish Status – see [here](#) for details of when this applies. A proportion of the fee goes to Liberal Judaism for administrative costs, another portion goes into a fund to assist small congregations with proselyte instruction, and a portion is remitted to us.

On registration with LJ proselytes will complete an application to become Associate Members (AM) of Sukkat Shalom. When an AM is registered with LJ, no AM fees are payable for their first two years as an AM.

### **The learning process will consist of the following**

- Exploring Judaism classes
- Instruction in basic Hebrew (at present by zoom classes organised by the Ark synagogue in London)
- Recommended reading

### **What we expect of converts during the learning process**

- Regular attendance at classes
- Regular attendance at our services (except under exceptional circumstances). If this does not happen the conversion process may be delayed
- Jewish partners are required to become members of Sukkat Shalom before the candidate registers officially, i.e., by completion of form G1A and B, except in exceptional circumstances and with rabbinic consultation

### **Once the learning process is completed**

- After an appropriate length of time for study and practice (usually around 12–15 months) the convert can expect to be asked or to ask if they would wish to go through the formal conversion process. Arrangements will then be made for them to travel to London to attend the Rabbinic Board or do so via zoom. Proselytes are required to submit two set essays one month prior to the interview with the Rabbinic Board as specified in the [LJ leaflet](#)
- B'rit Milah is generally required for male proselytes and should be arranged by the proselyte to take place some time prior to the Rabbinic Board. In certain circumstances the requirement may be waived, and this should be discussed confidentially with the rabbi

- Mikveh is optional in Liberal Judaism, although it is strongly recommended as a helpful and inspiring ritual. There is a mikvah located at the Sternberg Centre in North London, and a visit, with the rabbi in attendance, can normally be organised to take place on the same day as the interview with the Rabbinic Board. The visit to the mikveh is organised by the proselyte by contacting the Sternberg Centre, and a £15 fee is payable at the time of the visit

#### **Once a proselyte is accepted by the Rabbinic board**

- They become members of Sukkat Shalom and pay their dues (with any reductions for hardship negotiated with our treasurer, as is our arrangement for all our members)

#### **What converts can expect from us**

- Classes from Rabbi Mark
- Welcome at all of our events
- If they wish it, mentorship from a member of our congregation **who can act as a buddy** to help answer questions. Arrangements will be negotiated on an individual basis, usually at the time they complete the forms for LJ and become AMs. It is intended to be flexible and informal, maybe just meeting for lunch to see how the person's studying is going
- Elementary Hebrew reading lessons – and they should be expected to either attend these (see above) or get to an appropriate standard by some other means

[\(click here to return to Jewish Status and conversion to Judaism section in the main document\)](#)

## SUMMARY OF KEY LINKS

The table below shows links to the main documents relating to our governance.

DOCUMENT	LINK
<b>Constitution</b> Held on the website	<a href="#">constitution</a>
<b>Council</b> List of Council members, on website	<a href="#">List of Council members</a>
<b>Aim and Values</b> Held on the website but also reproduced within this document	Website link: <a href="#">Our aim and values</a> <a href="#">Link</a> to copy in this document
<b>Safeguarding Policy</b> Held on the website	<a href="#">Safeguarding policy</a>
<b>Privacy Notice</b> How we deal with data and comply with GDPR, on website	<a href="#">Privacy notice</a>

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