Haumoana Tree Trust — practical governance review and action plan

Chairs discussion document — the few changes likely to matter most

The Haumoana Tree Trust already has many strengths: it has operated for many years, has a clear environmental restoration purpose, uses volunteer trustees, and appears to have existing meeting and financial reporting habits — for example, meeting papers are circulated for meetings and draft annual financials are prepared for approval at the annual general meeting. The Trust is also a registered charity, with the Charities Register recording its purpose as protecting Haumoana waterways and wetlands, improving the water quality and biodiversity of the Grange Creek, and planting indigenous species.

The main governance opportunity is **not** to create bureaucracy. It is to make the Trust less dependent on a few long-serving people by capturing knowledge, clarifying roles, recording decisions, and putting light-touch oversight around money, conflicts, risks, and contractors. This fits the June 2026 Charities Services guidance, which says governance reviews are selfdirected, can be scaled to a charity's size and complexity, and may be as simple as a board discussion for smaller charities.

The diagram below summarises the simple governance "spine" to aim for — enough structure to protect continuity, but not so much that volunteers are burdened. It aligns with Charities Services' emphasis on proportionate reviews and practical actions, and the checklist's focus on purpose, roles, decision-making, financial oversight, risk, records, and next steps.

Figure 1: A simple governance spine for a small volunteer charitable trust: preserve purpose, spread knowledge, record key decisions, oversee money and contractors, manage risk, and review annually without creating heavy administration.

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1. Governance areas most relevant to the Trust

The 2026 checklist is well suited to the Trust because it is framed as a discussion tool, not a compliance audit, and says boards should identify practical improvements rather than answer every question perfectly. For a small environmental restoration trust with 7 volunteer trustees, no employees, the most relevant checklist areas are:

Governance area	Why it matters for Haumoana Tree Trust

Purpose and direction	The Trust's purpose is clear. Trustees meet to plan plantings. The checklist specifically asks whether activities link to purpose, whether priorities have been discussed in the past 12 months, and whether progress is tracked.
Roles, responsibilities, and succession	The highest practical risk is key-person dependency. The checklist asks whether officers know what is expected, whether responsibilities for key decisions are clear, and whether new officers receive induction or basic guidance.
Decision-making and records	Informal decisions may work until a trustee changes, a funder asks a question, or a contractor issue arises. The checklist asks whether key decisions, reasons, and follow-up actions are recorded in minutes.
Conflicts of interest	Small local trusts often involve landowners, sponsors, contractors, community relationships, and trustees with overlapping roles. Charities Services says conflicts are common and not usually a problem if identified, managed, and clearly recorded.
Financial oversight	Donations and sponsorship should be demonstrably applied to charitable purpose. The checklist asks whether the board approves a budget, reviews financial reports, has basic controls such as two signatories, and can explain how funds support charitable purpose.
Risk and contractor oversight	The Trust's work involves physical field activity, landowners, weather, plant survival, herbicide weed control, and contractors. The checklist asks whether the charity knows its top 3–5 risks, has simple controls, and revisits risks regularly.
Legal/reporting	Charities Services also says officers should understand legal duties, file annual returns, keep **obligations** details up to date, look after charity money, and keep financial records.

2. Likely highest governance risks, given your context

These are **risk-based observations**, not findings of failure. They follow from the Trust's volunteer model, informal processes, and reliance on long-serving trustees.

Highest risk: key-person dependency and knowledge loss

The Trust's greatest governance risk is likely continuity. If HTT knowledge sits with a few long-serving individuals, the Trust could lose knowledge about landowner relationships, sponsor expectations, planting sites, contractors, plant suppliers, grant cycles, creek history, and "how things are really done." Charities Services' new-officer guidance says officers should understand rules, legal obligations, risks, finances, records, strategy, sustainability, annual reporting, and succession; it recommends planning for succession and making an induction plan.

Second risk: informal decision-making becoming hard to evidence

Charities Services' checklist asks whether decisions, reasons, and follow-up actions are recorded in minutes, whether records are secure and easy to find, and whether decisions could be explained to a funder or regulator. Informal governance is not inherently bad, but the Trust should be able to show: **what was decided, why, who was conflicted if anyone, who was authorised to spend, and what follow-up was agreed**.

Third risk: contractor oversight and health/safety ambiguity

Because the Trust has no employees and uses contractors, it should avoid over-engineering health and safety, but it should not ignore it. WorkSafe notes that volunteer groups with a community purpose and no employees may be volunteer associations rather than PCBUs, and gives an example where a contracted person under a contract for services is not an employee. WorkSafe also says even organisations without HSWA duties should adopt good practices to keep volunteers healthy and safe, and that where PCBUs have overlapping duties they should consult, cooperate, and coordinate activities.

Conclussion

The governance aim for the Haumoana Tree Trust, should be **continuity, clarity, and confidence** — not corporate-style formality. The Trust should keep what already works, but make it easier for the next generation of trustees to understand the work, make decisions, manage money, keep good records and satisfy Charities Services requirements.