

**MINUTES OF THE PART I FINANCE, AUDIT & PERSONNEL MEETING OF
BIRCHWOOD TOWN COUNCIL
HELD AT PARKERS FARM, DELENTY DRIVE,
ON TUESDAY 14TH MAY 2024**

Present: Councillor Ellis in the Chair
Councillors Allman, Atkin, Ball, Brereton, B. Dhillon, K. Dhillon, Evans,
Price, Reeves, Sheridan and Simcock.

Clerk – Mrs. F. McDonald
Deputy Clerk/RFO – Mrs. C. Caddock
Administrative Assistant – Mrs. H. Thomas

1 Resident

Code of Conduct – Declaration of Interests

The Chair reminded Members of their responsibility to declare any personal interest or prejudicial interest which they have in any item of business on the agenda, no later than when the item is reached.

054/24-25 **PAYMENT OF ACCOUNTS**

Members were asked to consider and approve the payment of accounts schedule – (see pages 33 and 34 below).

Councillor Reeves **proposed** the payment of accounts be approved; Councillor Brereton **seconded** the proposal. This was **unanimously resolved** by those Members present.

055/24-25 **APRIL 2024 PART I FINANCE, AUDIT & PERSONNEL MEETING MINUTES**

Councillor Ball **proposed**, Councillor Simcock **seconded**, and it was **unanimously resolved** that: the Minutes of the Part I Finance, Audit & Personnel Meeting, held on 23rd April 2024, be approved as an accurate record and signed by the Chair.

PROGRESS

056/24-25 **BENCHES**

The RFO stated that we are still awaiting a response from WBC on this matter.

057/24-25 **WEBSITE**

The RFO briefly explained to the newly elected Councillors about the current change in website domain from ‘.org.uk’ to ‘.gov.uk’. She stated that the creation of the new website is ongoing, and it will need to be tested before it ‘goes live’.

The ‘.gov.uk’ email addresses will shortly ‘go live’ as well. These will be set up with an automatic BTC signature with the Town Council’s logo added.

The Chair asked that, when sending emails relating to BTC business to the three Councillors who hold the dual position of both Town and Borough Councillor, Members and Officers use their Town Council email addresses (rather than their WBC email addresses) otherwise, there is the potential for BTC matters to become ‘lost’ within their WBC emails.

058/24-25 **IT PROVIDER**

The RFO stated that Officers are continuing to liaise with the company that has been contracted to take over BTC's IT provision.

As there is some overlap with the previous IT provider, we have extended our SAAS Protection license for an additional three months (£33.41 per month). The new IT provider and website provider are liaising directly with each other regarding technicalities.

059/24-25 **ELECTION CHARGES**

The RFO reported that we have not yet received details regarding the cost of the recent election. Local Parishes are normally offered the option of paying over a number of years.

060/24-25 **INTERNAL AUDIT**

The RFO stated that she is continuing to prepare the necessary end of year financial information relating to the documents required for the end of year internal audit, including preparation of the documentation that will form the Annual Governance and Accountability Return (AGAR).

Once these have been 'signed-off' by the internal auditor, they will be submitted to Full Council at the June 2024 meeting, for approval prior to sending to the external auditor, by 1st July 2024 at the latest.

Documentation will be sent out in the next set of Councillor's papers.

061/24-25 **EXTERNAL AUDIT**

The RFO stated that she has commenced preparation of the end of year financial information relating to the documents required for the Annual Governance and Accountability Return (AGAR) for sending to the external auditor.

The RFO added that it is important that as many Councillors as possible attend the June 2024 meeting, as this is the time when Members confirm that they are satisfied with the accounting and governance procedures for the financial year 2023/2024.

062/24-25 **NEW NOTICE BOARD**

At the April meeting Members were asked to consider whether they would support the installation of a new notice board in Oakwood, as BTC does not currently have one in the area. Possible locations were discussed.

Members unanimously resolved they are happy for a new noticeboard to be installed in Oakwood, Birchwood (Minute 026/24-25 (d)).

The RFO contacted WBC and Birchwood CE Primary School regarding possible locations for the installation of a new notice board. We have not yet heard back from WBC, however Mr Latham, Headteacher of the school said that he would be happy for a board to be put on their fencing. He did ask if there would be space in the board for the school to have a sign.

The quote received for a bespoke board to match the ones we currently have in Gorse Covert and Locking Stumps (with posts – approx. £250.00) is £880.00 plus £60.00 delivery. If the board was to be installed on channel / railing fittings (on the fence) rather than on posts, these fittings would be slightly cheaper.

The RFO stated that Mr Latham has said there would be no financial liability to BTC regarding insurance.

There is a cheaper option for a single door 12 x A4 board (£627.00), but this would be taller rather than wider, and possibly not as easy to put items on (especially in the wind and rain). Also, this would have to be installed elsewhere on posts, as it would be too 'tall' to fit onto the school's fencing (and WBC may not give permission for an installation on its land).

After discussion, it was **unanimously resolved by Members** to purchase and install a notice board, in liaison with Birchwood CE Primary School, on their fencing.

Action RFO to confirm with Mr Latham that the school remains happy for a notice board to be fixed to their fencing. Once confirmed, to arrange for the purchase of the notice board.

063/24-25 **PUBLIC WORKS LOAN BOARD (PWLB) LOAN**

At the April meeting, the RFO reported that the principal outstanding balance for the PWLB loan on 31st March 2024 was £56,000.00.

Once the loan is fully paid, Birchwood Town Council will wholly own Parkers Farm, the attached barn and the land on which they stand.

Along with the car park, and a piece of land to the rear and adjacent to our offices, these are all assets held on behalf of the Birchwood Community.

The RFO had been asked to investigate whether the PWLB is currently offering discounted rates to encourage local authorities to pay off loans early. Previously penalty charges for early repayment had outweighed the total payment with interest (Minute 026/24-25 (b)).

The RFO circulated information to Members regarding the remaining payment dates and payments that are due if the Council continues to make payments as arranged to the end of the loan. Also included for information, was a list of the earmarked reserves resolved by Council for the 2024/2025 budget was circulated to Members.

The RFO also circulated the most recent information available from the PWLB as to what the payment would have been if it was made in full on 25th April 2024 (£56,703.84). There is, at present, a better 'deal' for paying loans off in full. However, this amount was not in the budget for the 2024/2025 financial year and cannot be allocated from earmarked reserves.

The RFO stated that if Members wish to consider paying the loan off early, this will have to form part of the discussion and considerations when setting the budget and precept for 2025/2026. The principal sum would then be £40,000 and the interest would be £2,850. The amount to pay would be the principal plus a penalty payment (unknown – but possibly around £500). This would mean that BTC would potentially 'save' around £2,350.

The RFO added that if the Council wanted to make one large payment to pay off the loan early, that the precept for the 2025/2026 year would have to increase sufficiently to enable this amount to be paid.

The Chair proposed that BTC continues paying as before, as the final payment of the loan is currently due to be made in September 2027. Therefore, by the end of the current Council's term, it will be paid in full. He stated that it is a low interest rate loan, and it will benefit the residents of Birchwood in the long run.

Members discussed the options as presented and **unanimously resolved** to continue paying the loan as previously scheduled/arranged.

064/24-25 **GENERAL MATTERS FOR REPORTING / NOTING**

To note that the renewal invoice for the ChALC 2024/2025 Affiliation Fee has been paid (£1,551.66).

NEW FINANCE, AUDIT AND PERSONNEL ITEMS

065/24-25 **BANK ACCOUNT RECONCILIATION**

Members received the Town Council's Income and Expenditure Statements and Bank Reconciliation Schedules for the accounting period 1st April 2023 – 30th April 2024.

The payroll figure for March 2024 was £13,330.03 (9) staff. The payroll figure for April 2024 was £13,634.13 (8 staff).

Councillors **unanimously resolved** that Members are happy with the schedules as presented. These will be signed by the RFO and the Chair, following the meeting.

066/24-25 **PROPOSED PHASE 3 LED UPGRADE**

The RFO stated that we have received a quotation (requested by BTC) for the potential final phase of replacing all the fluorescent light units within the Parkers Farm complex with LED lighting units. The remaining units (except for one) are all in the barn areas. There are 41 units in total. Most will require working at height and will need to be 'vapour proof' fittings.

The upgrade to these remaining lighting units from fluorescent to LED will assist the Council in becoming more energy efficient and should help to bring down BTC's electricity costs.

The quote, from the same company that undertook the previous two phases, is £2,653.10 plus VAT. Officers are happy with this company's work.

Members **unanimously resolved** to approve the third phase of lighting upgrades.

Action RFO to arrange for the third phase of the lighting upgrades to be undertaken.

067/24-25 **GENERAL MATTERS FOR REPORTING / NOTING**

- (a) To note that the annual fire extinguishers, fire blanket, fire alarm system and emergency lighting system check, was undertaken on 30th April 2024. The only issues raised were that two of the 2 kg powder van extinguishers require replacing (HK64 NNM and MK71 FVC), and the battery required replacing in the control board.

The extinguishers will cost a total of £70 +VAT, including a disposal fee for the two old extinguishers. The battery was £28 +VAT. The cost of the annual Fire Maintenance and Emergency Lighting servicing was £264.53 +VAT. The fire extinguisher annual service and annual fire blankets inspection total cost is £139.90 +VAT.

- (b) To note that Officers have arranged for the purchase of a BTC mobile phone from O2. For the last few years, the Clerk has been using her own personal phone for work purposes. This is eating into her personal data, battery life, etc. In addition, she often receives work calls out of hours and whilst on annual leave.

The phone is an iPhone SE 3rd Gen 64GB, with unlimited data. The cost is £20 up front and £32 per month for 36 months.

Councillor Atkin asked if the phone would be used often enough to justify unlimited data and believes there are more cost-effective phone deals elsewhere.

The RFO stated that the price difference between unlimited data, and less data was minimal and that the monthly contract includes payment for the phone itself. She informed Members that we have set up a monthly direct debit with O2 and have purchased a cable and charger plug.

The Chair suggested revisiting the contract when the current one is nearing completion.

- (c) The RFO stated that we have been informed by Locking Stumps Primary School of their intention to join 'One Community Trust' academy.

She stated that over 22 years ago, BTC entered into a 20-year agreement with the school regarding the Multi-Use Game Area (MUGA) located on their school grounds. It appears that over time there having been various 'comings and goings' of staff from all organisations involved, and that this agreement has been 'forgotten'.

The RFO said that as the school is now becoming part of an academy partnership, it seems that they want to revisit and re-formalise the agreement and may need to arrange a meeting with representative from BTC, WBC and Locking Stumps Primary School.

Members **unanimously resolved** that this be tabled for a future meeting.

- (d) The RFO handed a sheet of compiled Gas / Electric quotes to Members for their consideration from two sources (a third had not sent information requested).

Councillor Atkin stated that 'Octopus Energy' usually have the best residential rates, and asked if Officers could enquire whether they have similar business rates.

The Chair suggested enquiring if any companies do a tariff specifically for charging electric vehicles.

Action RFO to enquire with Octopus Energy if they have business tariffs.

Action RFO to enquire with energy companies regarding tariffs designed for electric vehicle charging.

This part of the meeting concluded at 7.55 pm

Payment of Accounts:							
Resolved: that the following payments be approved as the residual March 2024 and part of the April 2024 accounts							
Date	Ref	Payee	Description	Net	VAT	Gross	
20.03.2024	DD	Avoira	IT support, backups, internet services (4 x inv.) March 2024	£ 237.81	£ 47.56	£ 285.37	
20.03.2024	DD	Allstar	Fuel (vans and equipment)	£ 72.33	£ 14.47	£ 86.80	
21.03.2024	DD	E-on Next	Electricity - Locking Stumps MUGA (1st to 29th Feb 2024)	£ 13.51	£ 3.26	£ 16.77	
21.03.2024	*	Arco	Safety Boots (MA)	£ 57.59	£ 11.52	£ 69.11	
21.03.2024	*	Reimburse C. Caddock	i2Comply - 4 x Legionnaires training courses (FMc, CC, SJ, HT)	£ 84.00		£ 84.00	
21.03.2024	*	Reimburse C. Caddock	OT Group Ltd - 20 x green ring binders (ref: new Council files)	£ 23.28	£ 4.66	£ 27.94	
21.03.2024	*	Reimburse C. Caddock	Amazon - heavy duty punched pockets (ref: new Council files)	£ 14.82	£ 2.96	£ 17.78	
21.03.2024	*	Reimburse C. Caddock	Amazon seller - A4 plastic popper wallets	£ 7.49	£ 1.50	£ 8.99	
21.03.2024	*	Reimburse C. Caddock	Supplies for Schools Ltd - Extra wide file dividers	£ 48.32	£ 9.66	£ 57.98	
22.03.2024	*	PREMIOClean	Office cleaning services March 2024	£ 446.98	£ 89.40	£ 536.38	
27.03.2024	DD	Firstcom Europe	Office phone charges	£ 56.34	£ 11.27	£ 67.61	
27.03.2024	DD	Allstar	Fuel (vans and equipment)	£ 60.24	£ 12.05	£ 72.29	
28.03.2024	*	HMRC	Tax £1,476.80 Nil £ 2,110.32 (6 March 2024 to 5 April 2024)	£ 3,587.12		£ 3,587.12	
28.03.2024	*	Cheshire Pension Fund	Pension conts. re: March 2024 Eer £996.42 Eer £3,660.08	£ 4,656.50		£ 4,656.50	
02.04.2024	DD	LEVL	Geotab Pro Plus (in advance - April 2024 monthly subscription)	£ 30.00	£ 6.00	£ 36.00	
02.04.2024	DD	James Todd (Go Cardless)	Payroll services (in arrears - Feb 2024 fee)	£ 59.40	£ 11.88	£ 71.28	
03.04.2024	DD	Waterplus	Water and wastewater services (4083868280)	£ 25.46		£ 25.46	
03.04.2024	DD	Allstar	Fuel (vans and equipment)	£ 123.20	£ 24.64	£ 147.84	
03.04.2024	DD	Screw fix (B&Q a/c)	2 x wheelbarrows, 4 x shovels, 4 x brooms	£ 190.50	£ 38.10	£ 228.60	
03.04.2024	DD	Screw fix (B&Q a/c)	Timber, hacksaws and blades for L/S bench repair	£ 54.08	£ 10.82	£ 64.90	
03.04.2024	*	Reimb. Mrs C Caddock	Asda - Cleaning scourers and waste bin liners	£ 7.67	£ 1.53	£ 9.20	
03.04.2024	*	Reimb. Mrs C Caddock	Brookmoor Trading Ltd - Sticky dots for wall planners	£ 2.91	£ 0.58	£ 3.49	
03.04.2024	*	Zurich Municipal	2024/2025 Insurance Policies (inc. £553.59 IPT)	£ 5,166.86		£ 5,166.86	
04.04.2024	DD	Legal and General	Ill health insurance (adjusted for March 2023 overpayment)	£ 152.35		£ 152.35	
04.04.2024	*	Risley MOT & Truck Ltd.	HK64 NNM - Supply and fit tyre o/s rear outer wheel	£ 77.70	£ 15.54	£ 93.24	
05.04.2024	*	Helping Hand	Litter pickers x 15	£ 174.90	£ 34.98	£ 209.88	
08.04.2024	*	Risley MOT & Truck Ltd.	SC19 TYF - Full service, replace front brake pads, replace front ty	£ 567.93	£ 113.60	£ 681.53	
08.04.2024	*	April 2024 Wages	8 staff	£ 13,634.13		£ 13,634.13	
09.04.2024	DD	British Gas	Gas - Parkers Farm 24.02.24 to 21.03.24	£ 90.43	£ 4.52	£ 94.95	
11.04.2024	*	Hollis Electrical & Security Service	Replace 16 fluorescent light units for LED units in office/mess room	£ 1,062.38	£ 212.46	£ 1,274.84	
12.04.2024	DD	Waterplus	Water/wastewater services (4083867607)	£ 85.69		£ 85.69	
12.04.2024	*	J&K Ross Ltd	Safety Boots (JW)	£ 48.00	£ 9.60	£ 57.60	
12.04.2024	*	Reimburse C Caddock	Appliances Direct - fridge for mess room & removal/recycling of o	£ 154.08	£ 30.81	£ 184.89	
12.04.2024	*	Atlas FM Limited	Annual keyholder service	£ 489.64	£ 97.93	£ 587.57	
16.04.2024	DD	Avoira	IT support, backups, internet services (4 x inv.) March 2024	£ 237.81	£ 47.56	£ 285.37	

Payments of Account since 16th April 2024

Date	Ref	Payee	Description	Net	VAT	Gross
16.04.2024	DD	Financial Direct Fees	FD online charges - 01.03.2024 to 31.03.2024	£ 39.80		£ 39.80
17.04.2024	DD	Allstar	Fuel (vans and equipment)	£ 94.28	£ 18.85	£ 113.13
23.04.2024	DD	E-on Next	Electricity - Locking Stumps multi-use games area	£ 19.49	£ 0.97	£ 20.46
23.04.2024	*	Reimburse C Caddock	Amazon - toilet rolls x 72	£ 26.25	£ 5.25	£ 31.50
23.04.2024	*	Reimburse C Caddock	Krystal Hosting Ltd - 1 year domain renew al	£ 7.99	£ 1.60	£ 9.59
23.04.2024	*	Latus Group	New starter medical (HE)	£ 192.00	£ 38.40	£ 230.40
23.04.2024	*	Reimburse F McDonald	Petty cash float	£ 100.00		£ 100.00
24.04.2024	*	Premiclean	April office cleaning service	£ 446.98	£ 89.40	£ 536.38
24.04.2024	DD	Allstar	Fuel (vans and equipment)	£ 86.19	£ 17.24	£ 103.43
26.04.2024	*	Viking	Stationery	£ 117.37	£ 23.47	£ 140.84
26.04.2024	*	Matco Direct	Mat cleaning services - April 2024 to September 2024	£ 268.08	£ 53.61	£ 321.69
26.04.2024	*	Regal Polythene	40 x cases black bin sacks and 4 x boxes paper hand towels	£ 678.00	£ 135.60	£ 813.60
26.04.2024	*	Cheshire Association of Local Coun	Annual affiliation fee	£ 1,551.66		£ 1,551.66
28.04.2024	DD	Firstcom Europe	Phone charges (March 2024)	£ 60.90	£ 12.18	£ 73.08
28.04.2024	DD	BNP Paribas	Photocopier Lease	£ 170.00	£ 34.00	£ 204.00
30.04.2024	DD	James Todd	March 2024 payroll fee	£ 59.40	£ 11.88	£ 71.28
01.05.2024	DD	Waterplus	Water and w astewater services (4083868280)	£ 25.46		£ 25.46
01.05.2024	DD	LEVL	Geotab Pro Plus (in advance - May monthly subscription)	£ 30.00	£ 6.00	£ 36.00
01.05.2024	DD	Allstar	Fuel (vans and equipment)	£ 76.31	£ 15.26	£ 91.57
01.05.2024	DD	B&Q Trade Account	Rubber tray mats for rear of van & miscellaneous screws, etc.	£ 40.11	£ 8.02	£ 48.13
02.05.2024	*	Reimb C Caddock	Tool & Machinery Supply - Stihl Function basic helmet set PPE	£ 47.85		£ 47.85
06.05.2024	DD	Legal and General	Ill health insurance	£ 161.09		£ 161.09
07.05.2024	*	Cheshire Pension Fund	Pension conts. re: April 2024 Eee £1,032.75 Eer £3,417.73	£ 4,450.48		£ 4,450.48
07.05.2024	*	HMRC	Tax £1,530.60 NI £ 2,172.41 (6 April 2024 to 5 May 2024)	£ 3,703.01		£ 3,703.01
07.05.2024	*	May 2024 Wages	9 staff	£ 15,173.15		£ 15,173.15

Payments of accounts for approval at the May 2024 meeting

Date	Ref	Payee	Description	Net	VAT	Gross
all tbc	DD	Legal and General	Ill health insurance	£ 161.09		£ 161.09
	DD	Firstcom Europe	Phone/enhanced internet speed charges	£ 40.80		£ 40.80
	DD	Waterplus	Water and w astewater services (4083868280)	£ 25.46		£ 25.46
	DD	Waterplus	Water/w astewater services (4083867607)	£ 85.69		£ 85.69
	DD	Avoira	IT support, backups, internet services (4 x inv.) May 2024	£ 237.81	£ 47.56	£ 285.37
	DD	James Todd	April 2024 payroll fee	£ 58.00	£ 11.60	£ 69.60
	DD	E-on	Electricity - Locking Stumps multi-use games area	tbc		
	*	Premiclean	May office cleaning service (credit for Easter Monday to be accounted for on May 2024 invoice)	tbc		
	*	Elite Industrial Supplies (Hi Vis)	Workwear and PPE for new starter and restock of spares	£ 180.13	£ 36.03	£ 216.16
	*	Tool and Machinery Supply	Forestry Safety Helmet system	£ 47.85		£ 47.85
	*	Hollis Electrical & Security Services	Phase 3 LED upgrade - the barn lighting (41 units) w ith vapour proof fittings	£ 2,653.10	£ 530.63	£ 3,183.73
	*	Labdesk	IT Solutions - initial set up (£850.00 +VAT) and ongoing monthly charge of £223.80 +VAT	£ 1,288.56	£ 214.76	£ 1,073.80
	DD	Allstar	Fuel (vans and equipment)	£ 74.06	£ 14.81	£ 88.87
	DD	ASL	Photocopying charges	£ 39.85	£ 7.97	£ 47.82
	DD	Financial Direct Fees	FD online charges - 01.04.2024 to 30.04.2024	tbc		
	DD	British Gas	Gas - Parkers Farm	£ 76.72	£ 3.83	£ 80.55
	DD	LEVL	Geotab Pro Plus (in advance - June monthly subscription)	£ 30.00	£ 6.00	£ 36.00
	*	Derek Smith & Sons	Hanging baskets and plants + compost (approx £650.00 +VAT)	tbc		
	DD	B&Q Trade Account	Stain for planters, miracle grow, basket plants for Parkers Farm	tbc		
	DD	ASL	Photocopying charges	£ 73.92	£ 14.78	£ 88.70
	*	Eureka	3 x critical injury kit (bleed kit)	£ 156.00	£ 31.20	£ 187.20
	*	Black Box Group	12v 7 AH battery for fire alarm board	£ 28.00	£ 5.60	£ 33.60
	*	Black Box Group	6 monthly commercial fire maintenance service	£ 184.02	36 8	£ 220.82
	*	Black Box Group	6 monthly emergency lighting maintenance service	£ 80.51	£ 16.10	£ 96.61
	*	Black Box Group	Fire extinguishers annual service and fire blanket inspection	£ 139.90	£ 27.98	£ 167.88
	*	Cheshire Pension Fund	Pension conts. re: April 2024 Eee £1,130.72 Eer £3,759.76	£ 4,890.48		£ 4,890.48
	*	HMRC	Tax £1,531.40 NI £ 2,1352.18 (6 May 2024 to 5 June 2024)	£ 3,883.58		£ 3,883.58
	*	S&S Marquees Limited	Grant ref B/W Carnival - marquee, table and chair hire	£ 2,117.80	£ 423.56	£ 2,541.36