

**MINUTES OF THE APRIL PART I FINANCE, AUDIT & PERSONNEL
MEETING OF BIRCHWOOD TOWN COUNCIL,
HELD ONLINE, ON TUESDAY 27TH APRIL 2021, 6PM**

Present: Councillor Reeves in the Chair
Councillors Atkin, Bowden, D. Ellis, J. Ellis, Evans and Fitzsimmons
Clerk – Mrs. F. McDonald
Deputy Clerk – Mrs C. Caddock
Business and Finance Officer - Mr. G. Crowe

Apologies: Councillors Breslin (health) and M. Hearldon (dispensation)

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.

Councillors D. Ellis – Birchwood Youth & Community Centre Committee

Councillor D. Ellis – Climate and Ecological Emergency Commission and Birchwood Forum

026/21-22 **MARCH 2021 PART I FINANCE, AUDIT & PERSONNEL MEETING MINUTES**

Councillor D. Ellis proposed, Councillor Atkin seconded, and it was resolved that: The Minutes of the Part I Finance, Audit & Personnel Meeting that was held on Tuesday 23rd March 2021 be approved as an accurate record and signed by the Chair.

027/21-22 **PAYMENT OF ACCOUNTS**

Members were asked to consider and approve the payment of accounts schedule – (see pages 20 and 21 below).

Councillor Fitzsimmons **proposed** the Payment of Accounts be approved; Councillor Atkin **seconded** the proposal. This was **resolved** by those Members present.

PROGRESS REPORTS ON CURRENT FINANCE, AUDIT & PERSONNEL ITEMS

028/21-22 **BIRCHWOOD YOUTH AND COMMUNITY CENTRE (BYCC) – OWNERSHIP DISCUSSIONS**

- (a) The BAFO stated that further discussions regarding BYCC ownership will take place after the May 2021 elections, with the new Council.
- (b) To note that the invoice for work undertaken by the solicitor on a proposed lease (£556.00 +VAT) has been paid.

029/21-22 **PARKERS FARM ESTATE**

- (a) To note that the report regarding the rebuild valuation of Parkers Farm has been circulated to Members.

The valuer recommends that the buildings be insured on a Day One reinstatement basis (declared value) at not less than:

• The Farmhouse office building	£419,489.35
• The Barn	£320,836.25
• Car park and paving adjacent to the Barn	£35,918.38
• Total	£776,243.98

- (b) To note that the valuation has been sent to our insurance company. As the valuation is lower than a previous one, the insurance will be reduced slightly. We will receive a refund of £115.91, in due course, from our insurance company, as the annual insurance payment was made on 1st April 2021
- (c) To note the receipt of the invoice from the contractor who has carried out the damp proofing and repair of water damage works inside the office building (£3,150 +VAT). Members approved this invoice for payment.
- (d) To note the receipt of the invoice from Trinity Renovations for the 4th part payment for the works completed at Parkers Farm (£10,510.87 +VAT).

An amount of £1,217.90 has been retained until all the decorating and snagging work has been completed by Trinity. Members approved this invoice for payment.

030/21-22 **2020/2021 INTERNAL / EXTERNAL AUDIT**

- (a) To note that we have received the remote audit checklist from our internal auditor regarding our 2020/2021 end of year internal audit.
- (b) To note that we have received this year's timetable and specific document links, etc. from the external auditor (PKF Littlejohn). The deadline for submission of the Annual Governance and Accountability Return (AGAR) and supporting documents is Friday 2nd July 2021.
- (c) The BAFO and Deputy Clerk have started preparing the figures for the end of year accounts. These will be presented to the (new) Council for consideration / formal ratification at the June 2021 meeting.

031/21-22 **EMPLOYEE WAGES 2021/2022**

To note that the wage increases for the maintenance team, and facilities caretaker were implemented in the April payroll cycle; as resolved at the March 2021 meeting.

032/21-22 **REMOTE MEETINGS**

- (a) The Clerk has received information re: hiring the small lecture theatre at The Engine Rooms on Birchwood Park, as an option for holding Covid-safe face-to-face meetings. They do not have a large enough meeting room. The hire rate would be £250. We could only gain access to the room at 6pm, as there is another meeting booked in there which finishes at 5 pm– then the room etc would have to be sanitised.

The Clerk stated that the other option is BYCC, which she and Councillor D. Ellis have measured out, and is large enough for the meeting to take place in a Covid-secure way. There can be a one-way system put in place, and the doors and windows can be left open for a through-flow of air. It would cost £25 to hire, and we could gain access prior to 6pm.

If the weather is fine, we could even hold the meeting outdoors. The high school has not, as yet, replied to our query about room availability although currently their premises are closing at 5 pm.

The Clerk added that we have purchased hand sanitiser, disposable masks, and face visors for people to use / wear at the meeting. Free lateral flow test kits are also available for people to either order online or pick up from a local chemist, if Members wished to ensure they are not showing any signs of Covid before they come to the meeting. The Clerk and Deputy Clerk currently take a test once a week.

Members discussed the options and resolved that £250 to hire a room for a Town Council meeting cannot be justified when there are alternative options.

Because the legal judgement as to whether or not remote meetings can continue after 6th May 2021 is due between meetings, Members resolved that a final decision be delegated to the Clerk, BAFO and Chair.

Action Clerk's office to take relevant action and make the final decision once the outcome of the judgement is known.

- (b) To note that Officers have completed a survey circulated by SLCC regarding the Town Council's opinions on continuing with remote meetings. Members were asked for their thoughts, via email, and their comments were included. BTC would like remote meetings to be able to continue, after 6th May.
- (c) To note that a response has been received from the office of Charlotte Nichols MP, who has raised the issue with the Government.
- (d) An article published in the LGC on 16th April 2021, reported that 'Communities secretary Robert Jenrick said yesterday that the government would [support the argument that virtual meetings were permitted](#) by the Local Government Act 1972, despite the 'sunset clause' used to permit them in the coronavirus regulations ending on 6 May.' It is up to a judge to decide the case.

033/21-22 **GENERAL ITEMS FOR REPORTING / NOTING**

To note that the Public Works Loan Board statement at 31st March 2021 has been received. The total outstanding balance currently stands at £104,000.00.

The BAFO stated that there is currently about six and a half years left to pay on this loan.

NEW FINANCE, AUDIT AND PERSONNEL ITEMS

034/21-22 **BANK ACCOUNT RECONCILIATION**

To receive the Town Council's Income and Expenditure Statements and Bank Reconciliation Schedules for the account periods 1st April 2020 – 31st March 2021.

The payroll figure was £12,874.07 for February 2021 and £12,873.67 for March 2021.

After consideration and approval by Members the schedules will be signed by the Clerk or BAFO, and the Chair, as soon as is practicable.

Councillor Atkin **proposed**, Councillor J. Ellis **seconded** and Members **unanimously resolved** to approve the bank reconciliations.

035/21-22 **PENSION ITEMS**

- (a) To report that an email has been received asking the Town Council to supply details relating to our current and past members of the Cheshire Pension Scheme, to allow the Fund to enact the McCloud remedy. A data collection template has been supplied.

This is a legal requirement, to comply with legislative changes that will be made to the LGPS to remove unlawful age discrimination. The deadline for submitting the data is 30th June 2021.

The BAFO stated that this is quite a technical task, and has created a lot of additional administration work, which the Clerk has made a start on.

- (b) To note the receipt of an email regarding finalising year end figures. The Clerk checked with the Pension Fund, and it was confirmed that BTC is up to date with the MI submissions and LGS50 information.
- (c) To note the receipt of the new Contribution Return Form for 2021 – 2022. This is submitted to the Fund monthly (in addition to the Monthly Interface (MI) documentation).

036/21-22 **PRECEPT PAYMENT**

We have received notification from WBC that the precept has been paid into our Nationwide account.

037/21-22 **GENERAL ITEMS FOR REPORTING / NOTING**

- (a) To note that we have received our latest ‘Anti-virus Health Report’, ‘Computer Health Standards’ and ‘Performance Review’ from Yellowbus (8th April 2021), relating to our two office pcs and the laptop.
- (b) To note that an engineer was called out to investigate a recurring intruder alarm fault in the office area. The engineer investigated the fault, reset, and checked the whole system is working (£75.00 +VAT).
- (c) To note that our payroll service provider is ceasing the use of the ‘Open Space’ service and will be using the Sage Online portal from 1st April 2021.
- (d) To note that the BAFO, Clerk and Deputy Clerk attended a recent presentation regarding a Scribe Accounting package. The supplier suggested that the package would ‘save’ Officers around 8 hours work a month and assist in the production of end of year accounts, monthly reconciliations, and reports.

We were advised by the Sales Manager that, based on our precept, it would cost the Town Council around £85 per month.

We asked the local Parish / Town Councils whether they have any experience of the package. None do, although one was also undertaking some research about Scribe. Most use their own Excel spreadsheets, with formula as necessary – as we currently do.

The BAFO said that the time saving per month would, in reality, only amount to £40 monetary value, and as the in-house version we have used for many years passes audit verification, he doubts that it would be significantly beneficial to change at this stage.

Members were asked for their thoughts, and discussed the matter.

Councillor Atkin **proposed**, Councillor Fitzsimmons **seconded** and it was **resolved** by those Members present, for the Town Council to continue to use the current in-house accounting method.

- (e) To note the receipt of the invoice for the annual Affiliation Fee to ChALC (£1470.04 plus £17.00 for the subscription to Local Council Review). Officers find ChALC to be a useful source of information and advice.

Members were asked if they approve the renewal of our membership of ChALC, and of the invoice.

Councillor Fitzsimmons **proposed**, Councillor Atkin **seconded**, and it was **resolved** for the annual membership of ChALC to be renewed, and the invoice paid.

Action Clerk’s office to arrange for the administration of the membership renewal to ChALC.

- (f) Received – HMRC Employer Bulletin – April 2021.
- (g) To note that the BAFO has started to make preliminary enquiries about gas and electricity renewal costs, as both the accounts for Parkers Farm complex are due for renewal later in the year. Options will be brought to the July meeting for consideration.
- (h) To ask Members to approve a contribution to glasses for the Deputy Clerk – as noted is BTC policy for staff members undertaking VDU work in our Health & Safety Policy Handbook (pg. 10). Members **resolved** to approve this contribution (£100).

038/21-22 **FOR INFORMATION - POTENTIAL COMMUNITY PROJECT – LOCKING STUMPS PLAY AREA REFURBISHMENT**

For information (this will be deferred for formal discussion to the new Council in May 2021).

The BAFO reported that he has exchanged emails with WBC regarding BTC’s proposals to work in partnership to refurbish the small play area, on Borough Council land, behind the Turf & Feather public house in Locking Stumps. He proposed a preliminary figure of £20,000.

WBC has suggested that £20,000 will only fund minor works – “*Potentially a paint refresh, vegetation clearance, safety surfacing repair, springy animal feature, new swing seats etc.*” A site meeting has been arranged on 11th May 2021, to gauge what might be possible in this relatively small play area.

The BAFO stated that as the land is owned by WBC, the vegetation clearance and the safety surfacing repair, should normally be undertaken by WBC as part of their responsibilities for maintaining safe play areas.

Members agreed that this part of the cost should be paid for by WBC.

The BAFO stated that he will have a further discussion at the site meeting, and will update the new Council at the next available meeting.

039/21-22 **NOTES OF THANKS**

Councillor Atkin stated that he would like to take the opportunity to thank his fellow Members, Officers and staff for all their support during his time as a Councillor, especially during his year as Chair.

Councillor Reeves said that he would like to thank all those Councillors who have served on the Council, and are now stepping down, for their hard work and dedication to the community.

Councillor Bowden stated that he would like to place on record his thanks to all Members stepping down, some of whom have given many years of unremunerated service to the community and people of Birchwood. He added that their commitment has ensured that the Town Council is well respected, and has helped to make Birchwood, as a community, stronger.

This part of the meeting concluded at 7.50 pm

Payment of Accounts:						
Resolved: that the following payments be approved as the residual February 2021 and part of the March 2021 accounts						
Date	Ref	Payee	Description	Net	VAT	Gross
18.02.2021	DD	E-on Next	Gas - Parkers Farm	£ 467.85	£ 93.57	£ 561.42
19.02.2021	DD	E-on	Electricity - Locking Stumps multi-use games area	£ 10.52	£ 0.53	£ 11.05
19.02.2021	*	HMRC	Re:Jan 2021 Tax £1,403.20 NI £2,087.23	£ 3,490.43		£ 3,490.43
19.02.2021	*	Cheshire Pension Fund	Re: Jan 2021 E'ee £782.13 E'er £2,809.82	£ 3,591.95		£ 3,591.95
24.02.2021	DD	Allstar	Fuel (office vans, and equipment)	£ 106.45	£ 21.29	£ 127.74
25.02.2021	DD	Telesis (now t/a Firstcom eu	Phone charges	£ 57.46	£ 11.49	£ 68.95
03.03.2021	DD	Allstar	Fuel (office vans, and equipment)	£ 56.64	£ 11.33	£ 67.97
03.03.2021	*	CJ Auto Service	NH57 CZV - electrical repairs to beacon, indicator and tipper mechanism	£ 75.00	£ 15.00	£ 90.00
03.03.2021	*	Uniqwin	Annual key holder charge	£ 375.95	£ 75.19	£ 451.14
03.03.2021	DD	O2	Ref a/c 04760571 mobile phones	£ 45.62	£ 9.12	£ 54.74
04.03.2021	DD	Legal and General	Ill health insurance (February and March payments)	£ 325.32		£ 325.32
05.03.2021	*	Cube Property Services Ltd	Interim fee 2 - project management Parkers Farm works	£ 1,250.00	£ 250.00	£ 1,500.00
08.03.2021	*	March wages	Wages total this month (10 staff)	£12,873.67		£12,873.67
10.03.2021	DD	Public Works Loan Board	PWLB loan repayment (PW487017)	£10,660.00		£10,660.00
10.03.2021	DD	Allstar	Fuel (office vans, and equipment)	£ 34.38	£ 6.87	£ 41.25
10.03.2021	*	Millhouse Training Ltd	Hedgetrimmer refresher training (6 staff) and powered pole pruner pole pruner training (4 staff)	£ 1,400.00	£ 280.00	£ 1,680.00
10.03.2021	*	ESI	6 monthly servicing of fire alarm system and equipment and 6monthly testing of the emergency lighting system	£ 420.00	£ 84.00	£ 504.00
11.03.2021	*	Reimburse C Caddock	Spot On-Line Ltd - 4pk polythene dust sheets	£ 3.32	£ 0.67	£ 3.99
11.03.2021	*	Reimburse C Caddock	BC Profiles - 3 x cotton dust sheets	£ 16.86	£ 3.37	£ 20.23
11.03.2021	*	Office Depot	5 x reams A4 copier paper (back order)	£ 19.90	£ 3.98	£ 23.88
11.03.2021	*	Williams Garage	ND58 BZR - 2 x tyres	£ 139.90	£ 27.98	£ 167.88
11.03.2021	*	CJ Auto Service	NH57 CZV - investigate and repair engine management light coming back on, renew front coil springs and top mount engine intake clean (advised re: rear main oil seal)	£ 657.88	£ 131.58	£ 789.46
12.03.2021	DD	Waterplus	Water/wastewater services (4083867607)	£ 87.07		£ 87.07

Payments of Account since 15th March 2021

Date	Ref	Payee	Description	Net	VAT	Gross
15.03.2021	DD	Financial Direct Fees	FD online charges	£ 39.80		£ 39.80
15.03.2021	DD	Yellowbus Solutions	IT support/backups/internet services - inc. for	£ 134.70	£ 26.94	£ 161.64
16.03.2021	*	JDH Business Services Ltd	Interim Internal Audit 2020/2021	£ 294.00	£ 58.80	£ 352.80
16.03.2021	*	Cheshire Pension Fund	Re: Feb 2021 E'ee £780.95 E'er £2,805.48	£ 3,586.43		£ 3,586.43
16.03.2021	*	HMRC	Re:Feb 2021 Tax £1,399.60 NI £2,082.07	£ 3,481.67		£ 3,481.67
17.03.2021	DD	Allstar	Fuel (office vans, and equipment)	£ 151.23	£ 30.24	£ 181.47
22.03.2021	*	Reimburse C Caddock	Amazon - 2 x boxes staples	£ 3.98	£ 0.80	£ 4.78
22.03.2021	*	Reimburse C Caddock	Post Office - 2 x special delivery papers to GC	£ 15.30		£ 15.30
22.03.2021	*	Reimburse C Caddock	Amazon - stapler	£ 5.44	£ 1.09	£ 6.53
22.03.2021	DD	E-on	Electricity - Locking Stumps multi-use games area	£ 10.02	£ 0.50	£ 10.52
24.03.2021	DD	Allstar	Fuel (office vans, and equipment)	£ 74.17	£ 14.83	£ 89.00
26.03.2021	*	James Todd & Co	Administration of SSP claim	£ 60.00	£ 12.00	£ 72.00
26.03.2021	*	Arco	PPE - safety boots (JW)	£ 41.11	£ 8.22	£ 49.33
26.03.2021	*	Reimburse C Caddock	Amazon - C4 Envelopes (box 100)	£ 9.16	£ 1.83	£ 10.99
26.03.2021	*	James Todd & Co	Quarterly payroll Jan, Feb and March 2021	£ 180.00	£ 36.00	£ 216.00
29.03.2021	DD	Firstcom Europe	Phone charges	£ 57.46	£ 11.49	£ 68.95
29.03.2021	*	Warrington Borough Council	Recharge - HK64 NNM - tyre repair	£ 15.00	£ 3.00	£ 18.00
29.03.2021	*	RSL Northwest	Reinstatement Valuation of Parkers Farm for insurance purposes	£ 1,500.00	£ 300.00	£ 1,800.00
30.03.2021	*	Cheshire Pension Fund	Re: March 2021 E'ee £780.95 E'er £2,805.48	£ 3,586.43		£ 3,586.43
30.03.2021	*	HMRC	Re: March 2021 Tax £1,400.00 NI £2,082.07	£ 3,482.07		£ 3,482.07
31.03.2021	DD	Allstar	Fuel (office vans, and equipment)	£ 69.12	£ 13.82	£ 82.94
31.03.2021	DD	O2	Ref a/c 04760571 mobile phones	£ 45.62	£ 9.12	£ 54.74
31.03.2021	*	Warrington Borough Council	Repairs to brake warning light HK64 NNM	£ 542.29	£ 108.46	£ 650.75
31.03.2021	*	FDR Law LLP	Legal fees re: potential BTC/BYCC lease	£ 556.00	£ 111.20	£ 667.20
01.04.2021	*	Warrington Borough Council	Final payment 4/4 for previous Locking Stumps by-election	£ 1,322.34		£ 1,322.34
01.04.2021	DD	Waterplus	Water and wastewater services (4083868280)	£ 22.83		£ 22.83
01.04.2021	*	Zurich Municipal	Annual insurance (inc. £ 633.28 IPT)	£ 5,910.53		£ 5,910.53
06.04.2021	DD	Legal and General	Ill health insurance	£ 162.66		£ 162.66
07.04.2021	DD	Allstar	Fuel (office vans)	£ 118.48	£ 23.70	£ 142.18
07.04.2021	*	April wages	10 staff	£ 12,968.90		£ 12,968.90
12.04.2021	DD	Waterplus	Water/wastewater services (4083867607)	£ 87.07		£ 87.07
14.04.2021	DD	Allstar	Fuel (office vans)	£ 52.97	£ 10.59	£ 63.56
14.04.2021	*	Reimburse F McDonald	Petty cash float	£ 100.00		£ 100.00
14.04.2021	*	Duttons Mowerworld	Mini Stihl chain, grease, oil and 5l green 2/stroke	£ 81.54	£ 16.29	£ 97.83
14.04.2021	*	Arco	PPE - safety boots (PT)	£ 50.47	£ 10.09	£ 60.56
14.04.2021	*	C Caddock reimb. 3 x items:	Ryder Imports Ltd - box small disposable gloves	£ 6.66	£ 1.33	£ 7.99
		(total £69.44)	Peppy Group (UK) Ltd - 6 x 480ml hand sanitiser	£ 12.46	£ 2.49	£ 14.95
			Medicare Logistics Ltd - 60 x face visors	£ 38.76	£ 7.74	£ 46.50
14.04.2021	*	Abel Occupational Health Resolutions Ltd	2 x Occupational Health interviews / reports	£ 340.00	£ 68.00	£ 408.00
15.04.2021	DD	Yellowbus Solutions	IT support, backups, internet services (3 x inv.)	£ 134.70	£ 26.94	£ 161.64

Payments of accounts for approval at the April 2021 meeting

Date	Ref	Payee	Description	Net	VAT	Gross
all tbc	DD	Legal and General	Ill health insurance (April 2021)	£ 162.66		£ 162.66
	DD	Telesis	Phone/enhanced internet speed charges	tbc		
	DD	Waterplus	Water and wastewater services (4083868280)	£ 22.83		£ 22.83
	DD	Waterplus	Water/wastewater services (4083867607)	£ 87.07		£ 87.07
	DD	Financial Direct Fees	FD online charges	£ 42.60		£ 42.60
	DD	Yellowbus Solutions	IT support, backups, internet services (inc. for laptop) (4 x inv.)	£ 134.70	£ 26.94	£ 161.64
	DD	O2	Ref a/c 04760571 mobile phones	£ 46.21	£ 9.24	£ 55.45
	DD	E-on	Electricity - Locking Stumps multi-use games area	£ 9.31	£ 0.47	£ 9.78
	DD	Allstar	Fuel (office vans, mowers and equipment)	£ 119.80	£ 23.94	£ 143.74
	DD	CopyriteSystems	Photocopying charges	£ 93.45	£ 18.69	£ 112.14
	*	HMRC	Re: April 2021 Tax £1,469.60 NI £2,120.61	£ 3,590.21		£ 3,590.21
	*	Cheshire Pension Fund	RE:April 2021 E'ee £7xxxx E'er £2xxxx	tbc		tbc
	*	ChALC	Affiliation Fee 2021-22 & 1 subscription to Local Council Review	£ 1,487.04		£ 1,487.04
	*	ESI	Investigate intruder alarm fault / do full engineer reset	£ 75.00	£ 15.00	£ 90.00
	DD	E-on Next	Gas - Parkers Farm	tbc		
	DD	E-on Next	Electricity - Parkers Farm	£ 192.83	£ 9.64	£ 202.47
	*	Helping Hand	10 x litter pickers	£ 115.90	£ 23.18	£ 139.08
	DD	BNP Paribas	Photocopier rental 10/0/21 - 9/8/21	£ 343.00	£ 68.60	£ 411.60
	*	Gorman Restorations	Repairs/treatment to water damage ceiling and timbers, tanking to front office wall and front hallway wall, plastering	£ 3,150.00	£ 630.00	£ 3,780.00
	*	C Caddock	Contribution to glasses (VDU work)	£ 100.00		£ 100.00
	*	ESI	Engineer call-out - fault showing issue in loft (loose wire)	£ 120.00	£ 24.00	£ 144.00
	*	Office Depot	A4 binders x 14 and other stationery	£ 27.80	£ 5.56	£ 33.36
	*	Reimburse C Caddock	16 lg bottles washing up liquid & 18 bottles anti-bac handwash	£ 34.70	£ 6.94	£ 41.64