

**MINUTES OF THE PART I FINANCE, AUDIT & PERSONNEL MEETING OF
BIRCHWOOD TOWN COUNCIL
HELD AT PARKERS FARM, DELENTY DRIVE,
ON TUESDAY 25TH JUNE 2024**

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

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

Apologies: Councillor Ball and Councillor Reeves (personal)

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.

086/24-25 **PAYMENT OF ACCOUNTS**

Members were asked to consider and approve the payment of accounts schedule – (see pages 57 and 58 below).

The RFO stated that Councillor Atkin had noted one ‘typo’ in the schedule – that the June 2024 wages were listed as ‘£5,381.48’ but should read ‘£15,381.48’.

Councillor Atkin **proposed** that, with the amendment made as noted, the payment of accounts be approved; Councillor Brereton **seconded** the proposal. This was **unanimously resolved** by those Members present.

Action RFO to make the amendment to the accounts schedule.

087/24-25 **MAY 2024 PART I FINANCE, AUDIT & PERSONNEL MEETING MINUTES**

Councillor Evans **proposed**, Councillor Simcock **seconded**, and it was **unanimously resolved** that: the Minutes of the Part I Finance, Audit & Personnel Meeting, held on 14th May 2024, be approved as an accurate record and signed by the Chair.

PROGRESS

088/24-25 **BENCHES**

This item was discussed earlier in the meeting when the Clerk reported that it had been chased again, and she had spoken to the WBC Officer dealing with this matter at the recent 2024 Birchwood Carnival.

Some information was received earlier today within the WBC report sent by Simone. This indicates that WBC is replenishing its bench stock and is currently looking for a supplier.

The report also states that works for delivery would be ‘. . . based on the full cost recovery from BTC. This would also include if removal was needed.’

The RFO stated that previously BTC had been advised that the cost of installing a bench on a tarmac pad would be in the region of £1,500. She does not yet know whether a new supplier for the benches might mean that the cost will differ. If so, we will report this to Members as soon as possible.

Members were bemused that WBC has suggested that the cost of removal of an old bench on the Brook Footpath would be recharged to BTC.

The proposed benches for Gorse Covert and Locking Stumps are at new sites, so this would not apply to them. However, it had been proposed that BTC would fund the replacement of an old bench on the Brook Footpath that is no longer fit for purpose. As we believe this bench is WBC owned, Councillors were surprised that BTC might be expected to be charged for the removal of it.

Action Clerk’s office to continue to liaise with WBC regarding the proposed new benches.

089/24-25 **WEBSITE**

The RFO reported that the Clerk has been liaising with our new website provider and BTC’s new website is being progressed. It requires some additional information inputting and further checking prior to being ‘advertised’ to the community.

In order to maintain a smooth transition, our previous website provider was contracted to supply Joomla! support and website hosting for one additional month (£73.00). The RFO since asked for this to be extended for a further month (between meetings) and advised the Chair, Vice Chair and Leader of the Council accordingly.

Members acknowledged the action taken.

090/24-25 **ELECTION CHARGES**

The RFO reported that we have not yet received an invoice for the recent local elections.

091/24-25 **INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY (IT)**

The RFO informed Members that BTC’s pcs and the laptop have been updated. Everything is working well. Previous issues appear to have been solved by the updates. The contract has been formally signed and we have received the invoice.

In order to maintain a smooth transition, our previous IT provider was contracted to supply Cloud SAAS Protection for Office 365 for one additional month (£33.41 +VAT).

092/24-25 **OAKWOOD NOTICE BOARD**

The RFO reminded Members that at the April 2024 meeting it was unanimously resolved that a new noticeboard be purchased and installed in Oakwood, (Minute 026/24-25 (d)). A bespoke board has been ordered; to match the ones we currently have in Locking Stumps and Gorse Covert. It will have channel / railing fittings (£855.00 including delivery +VAT).

The RFO confirmed with the Headteacher of Birchwood CE Primary School that he remains happy for a board to be put on their fencing. We will liaise regarding the exact positioning.

The RFO said that Officers looked at various prices for new boards from different companies. However, this is a bespoke order and therefore a proprietary purchase. The cost, compared to other suppliers (who do not offer what we were looking for) is very reasonable. Therefore, it has been purchased subject to the exception in the Financial Regulations:

“11. CONTRACTS

Every contract shall comply with these financial regulations, and no exceptions shall be made otherwise than in an emergency provided that this regulation need not apply to contracts which relate to items (i) to (vi) below: . . .

(vi) ‘. . . for goods or materials proposed to be purchased which are proprietary articles and/or are only sold at a fixed price.’”

093/24-25 **GENERAL MATTERS FOR REPORTING / NOTING**

- (a) As agreed at the April 2024 meeting, the final phase of replacing all the fluorescent lighting units with LED lighting units will take place on 4th and 5th July 2024.
- (b) As agreed at the April 2024 meeting, an iPhone SE 3rd Gen 64GB, with unlimited data (three-year contract) has been purchased, for the Clerk / other Officers to use for work purposes.

NEW FINANCE, AUDIT AND PERSONNEL ITEMS

094/24-25 **BANK ACCOUNT RECONCILIATION**

To receive the Town Council’s Income and Expenditure Statements and Bank Reconciliation Schedules for the accounting period 1st April 2023 – 31st May 2024.

The payroll figure for April 2024 was £13,634.13 (8) staff. The payroll figure for May 2024 was £15,173.15 (9 staff).

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

Councillor Atkin **proposed** that the reconciliation be approved, Councillor Sheridan **seconded** the proposal. This was **unanimously resolved** by those Members present.

095/24-25 **ANNUAL HEALTH AND SAFETY AUDITS**

- (a) ‘General Risk Assessment’ and ‘Fire Risk Assessment’

To note that the annual Health and Safety Audits undertaken by our current contracted Health and Safety specialists at which the ‘General Risk Assessment’ and ‘Fire Risk Assessments’ are reviewed and updated, will be undertaken on 25th July 2024.

- (b) Legionella Risk Assessment

To note that since last year’s Health and Safety Audit, a Legionnaire’s Disease Risk Assessment and water testing was carried out. There is no evidence of Legionella Disease within BTC’s water system. Weekly water flushing and monthly temperature testing continue.

096/24-25 CO-OPERATIVE BANKING

The RFO asked Members to consider approving the addition of the Administrative Assistant as an Officer who can set up payments for approval on the Co-operative Community Directplus account. This will give the office greater flexibility to ensure the continued smooth payments of invoices, particularly during the main annual holiday periods. It will also ensure business continuity if either the Clerk or RFO are not available for any length of time. This will require the purchase of one additional bank token.

The RFO reminded Members that Councillor Atkin has a banking token in case of an 'emergency', but added that for efficiency, Officers believe that it would be sensible for each member of office staff to be able to set-up payments, with the Clerk and RFO authorised to approve them.

Members discussed this proposal. It was **unanimously resolved** that, going forward, the Administrative Assistant be authorised to set up payments on the Co-operative Bank's accounts.

Action Clerk's office to arrange the purchase of a banking token for use by the Administrative Assistant, and to train her regarding the bank's processes for setting up payments.

097/24-25 DIGITAL ACCOUNTING PROPOSAL

The RFO stated that, at present, all BTC's accounts are prepared using Excel spreadsheets and Word documents, on an Income and Expenditure basis. Currently only the RFO has the experience of preparing the accounts.

The RFO asked Members to consider the option of using an accounting package going forward. This would augment future business continuity strengths, by enabling all Officers (after training), and if necessary (for example in the event of annual leave or any potential issues with long-term sickness), to be able to prepare monthly reports and the accounts much more easily, and it would assist in the prevention of errors.

Documentation, and the proposal was circulated to Members via email and in their papers.

Many accounting packages are on the market. Most are built for businesses with 'profit and loss' accounts.

The RFO said that she has looked at various accounting packages and re-visited Scribe, an accounts package that has been exclusively designed for Town, Parish and Community (Wales) Councils.

Scribe has been designed to make it easy to produce compliant Council accounts and is recommended by the SLCC, NALC and ChALC. It can automatically produce reports and specifically the AGAR at the end of year. This will save a substantial amount of Officer time.

The Clerk and RFO had an online meeting on 6th June 2024 with a representative of Scribe to talk through what BTC's needs would be.

The Lite option does not offer enough features for BTC's requirements. The Premium level is £4 more expensive per month than the Professional option but it has the additional benefit of phone and 1:1 Zoom support, and some more customisation options.

There would be an initial set-up fee of £797 +VAT, then either an £84 +VAT or £89 +VAT per month cost.

The RFO said that as Birchwood Town Council has a significant amount of funds (over £700,000 annually) that the Clerk and RFO are responsible for 'manually' accounting for, streamlining the way in which financial reports, monthly reconciliation, the accounts, etc. are prepared might be a judicious step for BTC to take.

Members discussed the above proposal.

It was **unanimously resolved** that the Council will approve the switch to a digital accounting package and that Officers can arrange to purchase the Premium version of Scribe.

Action Clerk's office to contact Scribe regarding the above

As this is a proprietary package, as such it can be purchased, as an 'exception' as per our Financial Regulations *11.1(a) (vi) 'for goods or materials proposed to be purchased which are proprietary articles and/or are only sold at a fixed price.'*

098/24-25 **TANGIBLE ASSETS**

The RFO asked that Members consider and approve the accuracy of the three lists of tangible assets held, as at end March 2024:

- Asset Register - Vehicle Schedule
- Register of Council Assets and Equipment – including buildings and land owned
- Plant and Equipment Inventory of Depot

These assets are monitored on an ongoing basis for any issues, damage, wear, etc. and action is taken if necessary to repair, replace, decommission or add any asset to the Council's resources.

Summarised details of the assets held by the Town Council are also included on the 'Supporting Notes to the Accounting Statement Assets Held by the Town Council – March 2024' which was copied to Members in their papers.

It was **proposed** by Councillor Brereton, **seconded** by Councillor Atkin and **unanimously resolved** that the content of the above three Asset Registers be noted and approved.

099/24-25 **ILL HEALTH LIABILITY INSURANCE (IHLI)**

The RFO asked Members to note the receipt of renewal information regarding the IHLI. Membership data has been submitted regarding the membership of Cheshire Pension Fund as of 1st April 2024. From that the cost of the IHLI is calculated. There is usually a 'mop-up' charge made following the receipt of this information, along with notification of the monthly fees for 2024/2025.

100/24-25 **EV COST SAVING AND CO2 EMISSION SAVINGS**

The RFO stated that for information, as requested by Councillors, she had circulated a copy of a report showing the average cost savings and CO2 emissions savings from running the two electric vehicles, MK71 FUU and MK71 FVC between the dates 18th June 2023 and 18th June 2024.

There is an average financial saving (which will have fluctuated due to changing diesel and electricity costs) of £2,059.94 for the year. The CO2 emissions saving for the year is 3,724.15 kg.

Members noted the report.

101/24-25 **PROPOSED RENEWAL OF ACROBAT PRO FOR TEAMS SUBSCRIPTION**

To ask Members to consider renewing 2 x annual licenses for Acrobat Pro (£243.00 per license). The previous license lapsed on 19th June 2024.

Officers briefly explained to Members why they found this license to be beneficial to their working efficiency.

Members discussed the above proposal.

It was **unanimously resolved** that the Council will approve the renewal of the Acrobat Pro license.

Action RFO to arrange for the licenses to be renewed.

102/24-25 **GENERAL ITEMS FOR NOTING/REPORTING**

- (a) PAT testing took place on 12th June 2024.
- (b) The Health & Safety and Fire Risk Assessment Audits have been arranged to take place on 25th July 2024.
- (c) Received – information re: cost of an extended warranty for SC19 TYF.
- (d) Received – updated information from NALC re: LTN 22 Disciplinary and Grievance Arrangements in Local Councils and LTN 23 Health and Safety.
- (e) To note an increase in the annual cost of supplying/maintaining one sanitary hygiene bin (up £8.88 p.a.).
- (f) To note that Officers have booked an online meeting with ‘Worknest’ to take place on 16th July. This company offers Health and Safety and Employment Law packages.

Officers are undertaking market testing to see if BTC can achieve better value for money for these services once our current contracts end. We currently have two different contracts to cover these services.

The RFO said that a meeting has also been arranged with Elcons, another company that offers similar ‘packaged’ services.

- (g) To note that one of our water bills has increased by £7.34 per month (from £25.46 to £32.80).
- (h) To note that the cost of electricity for the MUGA (with E-on Next) has gone up, mainly due to the standing charge increasing to 56p/day. We are in a one-year contract with them.

The RFO said that she has, as requested, investigated the option of using Octopus Energy as a supplier for Parkers Farm services. They will only supply energy directly, not via a broker.

Octopus generally requires a ‘deposit’ upfront, which is only completely returned once a contract with them is finished. They would therefore be classed as ‘debtors’ within the end of year accounts for the length of any contract with them.

The RFO stated that she does have some figures from Octopus but said that she will update them prior to the next meeting and discuss them in line with other quotes, as she has also asked for revised figures and some additional information from two brokers, for presentation at the July 2024 meeting.

Consideration of the options and a decision regarding electricity and gas suppliers must be made at the July meeting as the current contracts are coming to an end (30th September 2024 and 1st October 2024 respectively). New contracts will need to be signed and in place prior to these two dates.

103/24-25 **END OF YEAR ACCOUNTS**

Prior to discussion of the end of year accounts, the RFO offered new Councillors a brief explanation of how important this financial meeting is. At this meeting the Council is presented with ‘evidence’ of the culmination of the accounting and governance processes that take place throughout the year, along with final documentation, figures and balances, for consideration and approval. The importance of the Internal Auditor’s Report and the Annual Governance and Accountability Return (AGAR) was also explained.

104/24-25 **INTERNAL AUDIT OF ACCOUNTS FOR THE YEAR END 31ST MARCH 2024**

- (a) The RFO said that prior to formally submitting the documents to the internal auditor, she had asked for some guidance from him, as she had a query on a matter that she was finding difficult to reconcile.

The RFO reported that she was asked by the internal auditor to send the draft documents to him, even though she was still looking to find where the ‘error’ was, hoping to be able to correct it before sending. She sent them (reluctantly) knowing they were not correct.

The internal auditor was able to offer the RFO an indication as to where the problem lay, which enabled her to amend the draft accounts and include the corrected figures on the AGAR and resubmit them to the internal auditor.

- (b) The RFO reported that the internal auditor undertook the (remote) final end of year audit on 31st May 2024. A copy of the year end Internal Audit Report can be found on pages 59 to 63 below.

The ‘issue’ raised regarding the draft document was identified in the report.

“The ‘balances carried forward’ and ‘other payments’ in the AGAR were incorrect as the balances per the bank reconciliation had been inserted in box 7. and payments instead of expenditure in box 6.

The supporting analysis to expenditure was incorrect as the total included payments, rather than expenditure as adjusted via the extended trial balance.”

- (c) Once the amended documents had been sent to the internal auditor, he was then satisfied that they had been prepared in accordance with proper practices. He therefore signed and returned the Internal Audit Report section of the Annual Governance and Accountability Return (AGAR).

The following recommendation was made:

“The year end accounts preparation should be subject to a review before finalising the AGAR figures to ensure the audit trail is accurate from the receipts and payments accounts through to the extended trial balance, the balance sheet and the income and expenditure accounts.

NB The draft account were (sic) amended to include the corrected figures in the final AGAR accounts.”

The RFO commented that when the former BAFO was in post, she and him were able to check each other’s work on the monthly and the end of year accounts.

At present Officers have not yet had corresponding available time for the RFO to show the Clerk and/or Administrative Assistant how the accounts are prepared.

All Officers will be able to train on the Scribe accounting software in their own time via webinars, complemented with Zoom calls or phone calls to Scribe if necessary. This is an additional reason why moving to a digital accounting package is appropriate.

- (d) A batch of documents, used to produce the AGAR and pro-forma that will be submitted to the external auditor was circulated to Members in their papers for information. These are a few of the documents sent to the internal auditor in relation to the 2023/2024 end of year audit.
- (e) The three recommendations from the interim internal audit, that took place remotely on 1st February 2024 have been implemented (minute 336/23-24 (i), (ii) and (iii)).

As the Town Council is currently in the process of switching to our new website, the recommendation relating to the first matter in the interim report, specifically the ‘Transparency Code’ will be updated on the new site as soon as possible:

“Local authorities must also publish details of any contract, commissioned activity, purchase order, framework agreement and any other legally enforceable agreement with a value that exceeds £5,000.”

- (f) Members were reminded of the continuing internal auditor appointment for 2023/2024 and method of working, including the ‘remote’ year-end audit process for 2023/2023.

The RFO asked Members to consider whether they are happy to continue with the services of our current internal auditor for 2023/2024.

It was **proposed** by Councillor Sheridan, **seconded** by Councillor Evans and **unanimously resolved** that the Town Council continues with our current internal auditor.

Action Clerk’s office to contact our internal auditor regarding the above, to ask if he wishes to continue as our internal auditor for 2024/2025, and to request that, if so, he confirms his independence from the Town Council.

105/24-25 **EARMARKED RESERVES**

- (a) The RFO stated that, as mentioned in minute 104/24-25 (d) above, a pack of finance documents was circulated to Members in their papers. These, along with other information from the monthly reconciliation schedules, which are presented to Councillors at each monthly meeting, are used to create the final end of year accounts figures.

These documents include the Balance Sheet which details the final balances and earmarked reserves/funds as at 31/03/2024, for the Council's approval.

- (b) Members were asked to note that the balances for 31/03/2024 reflected finalised working balances / earmarked reserves of £378,551.87, and to formally consider and approve these balances:

Working balances (6 months)	£195,000.00
Additional general balance (previously in higher Earmarked Reserves)	£31,551.87
Community Development Fund	£40,000.00
General equipment (inc. vehicles)	£70,000.00
Election fees	£12,000.00
Contingency fund	£30,000.00
Total	£378,551.87

Councillor Brereton **proposed**, Councillor Atkin **seconded**, and it was **unanimously resolved** that Members approve the reserves and balances as at 31/03/2024, as listed above.

106/24-25 **ANNUAL GOVERNANCE STATEMENT (AGAR PART 1) / FINANCIAL RISK ASSESSMENT REVIEW**

- (a) To comply with the financial year end requirements, specifically the Annual Governance and Accountability Return (AGAR) Part 1 Members annually spend time going through the existing financial control mechanism: the present method of managing and reporting of the Council's financial information.

- (b) **Risk Assessment Review**

The RFO reminded Members that at the March 2024 Finance Part I meeting it was unanimously resolved that 'Appendix C – Annual Risk Assessment Review (Financial and Operational Processes)' be approved (see Minute 377/23-24). This formed part of the documentation required for approval by the internal auditor.

A copy of 'Appendix C' can be requested from the office – Tel: 01925 819440, or email: clerk@birchwoodtowncouncil.org.uk . Pages 1-7 of the appendix is a list of all the health/safety and risk assessment issues considered by Council and/or dealt with by Council in 2023/2024.

The '*Annual Review of Internal Controls - Summary of Health and Safety Risk Assessment and Management/Budgetary Control Issues Considered and/or Dealt with During the 2022/2023 Financial Year*'; referred to as 'Appendix A', are listed on pages 8 to 12 of 'Appendix C'.

(c) **Standing Orders and Financial Regulations**

The RFO reminded Members that the Council's Standing Orders and Financial Regulations, were discussed and formally approved during the main May 2024 Annual Council Meeting (minutes 039/24-25 and 040/24-25).

Members considered the Standing Orders and amended Financial Regulations (in May 2024) to be comprehensive and will cover and safeguard the management of the Council's finances and control information for the 2024/2025 financial year.

The requirements of our Financial Regulations continue to be enhanced with the internal control via the Council's monthly receipt of its Statement of Income and Expenditure and the monthly reconciliation with the bank accounts.

All accounts for cheque payment (if any) each month are authorised and only Members sign cheques (no Officers are involved in cheque signing for the Co-Operative account).

The financial schedules also show all the regular direct debits/standing orders currently set up, which are for utilities or other regular monthly payments.

All transactions are shown on the monthly control and reconciliation sheets.

Online transactions are monitored monthly by Members. The process for BACS payments is included in the Financial Regulations (sections 5.1 and 5.5).

The management and signatories for the Nationwide account continue to be vested to the Clerk, the Responsible Finance Officer and Councillor D. Ellis.

The Nationwide's account information continues to be presented to the Council as part of the Council's regular monthly reconciliation at each monthly meeting. Funds continue to be transferred from the Nationwide account to the Co-Operative Bank account, when necessary, to split the financial risk, keeping the amount in the Co-operative account to a maximum of around £85,000 - £100,000.

The amount of £85,000 is the maximum amount the Town Council would be able to recover from either bank under the Financial Services Compensation Scheme (FSCS).

The Town Council continues to use the Co-operative Bank's online banking service; which the Co-operative Bank updates from time to time, keeping the same security protocols in place.

At the July 2021 Part I Finance meeting (see Minute 273/21-22 (d)) the Council resolved that Councillor Atkin be added as a processor for set-up of payments, on the Co-operative Bank account, if required.

The comprehensive security aspects of operating the system have previously been formalised by the Town Council and involve a transaction authoriser and an approver; no one person may carry out online monetary bank transactions (see Financial Regulations, section 5.5).

The Chair or a member of the Finance Sub-Committee continues to undertake a monthly check of a random sample of around five payments to suppliers and countersigns the record of payment document.

When pay rates change, they are checked by the Chair of the Council to ensure the correct new rates have been applied. The payroll bureau is notified of the changes in the manner agreed with our internal auditor following the interim internal audit in February 2023.

- (d) In addition, clear procedure detail is given within the Financial Regulations for the Council, its Clerk and Finance Officer to process the following activities:
- (i) Annual estimates
 - (ii) Budgetary control
 - (iii) Accounting and audit
 - (iv) Banking, cheque processing and direct debits/standing orders
 - (v) Payment of account
 - (vi) Payment of salaries
 - (vii) Dealing with income
 - (viii) Loans and investments
 - (ix) Orders for work, goods, services and any contract work and contract payment arrangements
 - (x) Managing stores and equipment
 - (xi) Properties, buildings, etc., and relevant insurance cover.
- (e) Members have considered the previous interim reports from the internal auditor and noted that all the recommendations have been implemented
- (f) The RFO reminded Members that the Town Council received a comment following the submission of the 2022/2023 External Audit. This was the result of a ‘typo’ in copying the previous year’s figures across – it did not affect the 2022/2023 figures:
- “The AGAR was not accurately completed before submission for review:*
- *The figures in Section 2, Boxes 4 and 6 of the prior year comparative column do not agree to the prior year final signed AGAR. Section 2, Boxes 4 and 6 for the prior year should read £232,953 and £126,722 respectively.”*
- (g) For 2023/2024 we remained with our insurance provider (Zurich) with the level of £1 million pounds of fidelity insurance.
- (h) After discussion and deliberation Councillor Evans **proposed**, Councillor **Atkin** seconded, and Members **unanimously resolved** that the Council:
- (i) is satisfied and content with the current level of financial controls and information reporting procedures presently in existence
 - (ii) is content with the internal audit and risk assessment processes undertaken by the Clerk, RFO/Deputy Clerk and internal auditor
 - (iii) will again, in future years, review all the control processes as part of the year-end financial procedures
 - (iv) be involved in the selection and output reporting for the Council’s audit and risk assessment activities
 - (v) after consideration of the internal audit report for 2022/23 that Members confirm the reappointment of the internal auditor to undertake the 2023/2024 audit function.

- (i) The RFO reported that the ‘public notice’ displaying regarding electors’ rights to review the accounts for the 2023/2024 financial accounting period will be published on 28th June 2024 to ‘advertise’ the period during which the public can arrange to come to the office to inspect the accounting records in person as between 1st July 2024 to 9th August 2024.

107/24-25 **APPROVAL OF THE ANNUAL ACCOUNTS AND ANNUAL GOVERNANCE & ACCOUNTABILITY RETURN (AGAR) 2023/2024**

- (a) The RFO reminded Members that Town and Parish Councils are now required to prepare and submit their Annual Governance and Accountability Returns (AGAR) based primarily on the gross income and expenditure of a Council for a particular financial year.
- (b) After full consideration of the 2023/2024 accounts schedules produced by the RFO, in the Income and Expenditure format and with the extensive supporting schedules; in accordance with Accounts and Audit Regulations 2015 (the Regulations) as amended; Councillor Atkin **proposed**, Councillor Sheridan **seconded** and it was **unanimously resolved**:
- (i) That the annual accounts for 2023/2024 as prepared by the RFO and the supporting documentation including working documents, bank account statements, Public Works Loan statement, Section 137 awards, the asset and equipment registers, and list of health and safety risk assessment actions and internal controls be accepted.
- (ii) That these figures and statements become the source data for the completion of the Annual Governance Statement and the Accounting Statements for 2023/2024.
- (iii) That the RFO presents to Members the completed AGAR for 2023/2024 with its summary income/expenditure headings reflecting the 2022/2023 accounts data – for Council approval and signatures.

(c) **AGAR – Section 1**

The RFO therefore presented to Members for their consideration, **Section 1** of the Annual Governance Statement for the Annual Accounts for 2023/2024 including the ‘Yes/No’ answers to Section 1 of the AGAR which read as follows:

- **1** We have put in place arrangements for effective financial management during the year, and for the preparation of the accounting statements.
YES
- **2** We maintained an adequate system of internal control including measures designed to prevent and detect fraud and corruption and reviewed its effectiveness.
YES
- **3** We took all reasonable steps to assure ourselves that there are no matters of actual or potential non-compliance with laws, regulations and Proper Practices that could have a significant financial effect on the ability of this authority to conduct its business or manage its finances.
YES

- **4** We provided proper opportunity during the year for the exercise of electors' rights in accordance with the requirements of the Accounts and Audit Regulations.
YES
- **5** We carried out an assessment of the risks facing this authority and took appropriate steps to manage those risks, including the introduction of internal controls and/or external insurance cover where required.
YES
- **6** We maintained throughout the year an adequate and effective system of internal audit of the accounting records and control systems.
YES
- **7** We took appropriate action on all matters raised in reports from internal and external audit.
YES
- **8** We considered whether any litigation, liabilities or commitments, events or transactions, occurring either during or after the year-end, have a financial impact on this smaller authority and, where appropriate have included them in the accounting statements.
YES
- **9** (For local councils only) Trust funds including charitable. In our capacity as the sole managing trustee we discharged our accountability responsibilities for the fund(s)/assets, including financial reporting and, if required, independent examination or audit.
N/A

After consideration of the **Section 1** Annual Governance Statement for the Annual Accounts for 2023/2024 Councillor Brereton **proposed** and Councillor Sheridan **seconded** that to the best of the Town Council's knowledge and belief, with respect to the declarations for the year ended 31st March 2024 that these be accepted as accurate and that the Annual Governance Statement be approved.

Members **unanimously resolved** that the Annual Governance Statement 2023/2024 be approved, and signed as necessary.

(d) **AGAR - Section 2**

The RFO then presented to Members for their consideration, **Section 2** of the Annual Governance Statement for the Annual Accounts for 2023/2024.

After consideration of the **Section 2** Accounting Statements for the Annual Accounts for 2023/2024 Councillor Brereton **proposed** and Councillor Evans **seconded** that to the best of the Town Council's knowledge and belief, with respect to the accounting statements for the year ended 31st March 2024 that these be accepted as accurate, and that the Town Council's Accounting Statements 2023/2024 be approved.

Members **unanimously resolved** that the Section 2 Accounting Statements for the Annual Accounts for 2023/2024 be **approved**, and signed as necessary.

- (e) Councillor Atkin **proposed** and Councillor Simcock **seconded** that Members of the Town Council formally approve the adoption of the 2023/2024 AGAR.

Members **unanimously resolved** that the AGAR for 2023/2024 be approved for adoption and be submitted to the external auditor.

The relevant sections of the AGAR referred to above are attached (see pages 64 to 66 below).

Action The RFO to compile the necessary documents and to send them to the external auditor.

- (f) The RFO asked Members to note that the invoice from our internal auditor for his year-end internal audit services for 2023/2024 (£422.00 +VAT) has been paid.

The meeting concluded at 7.30pm.

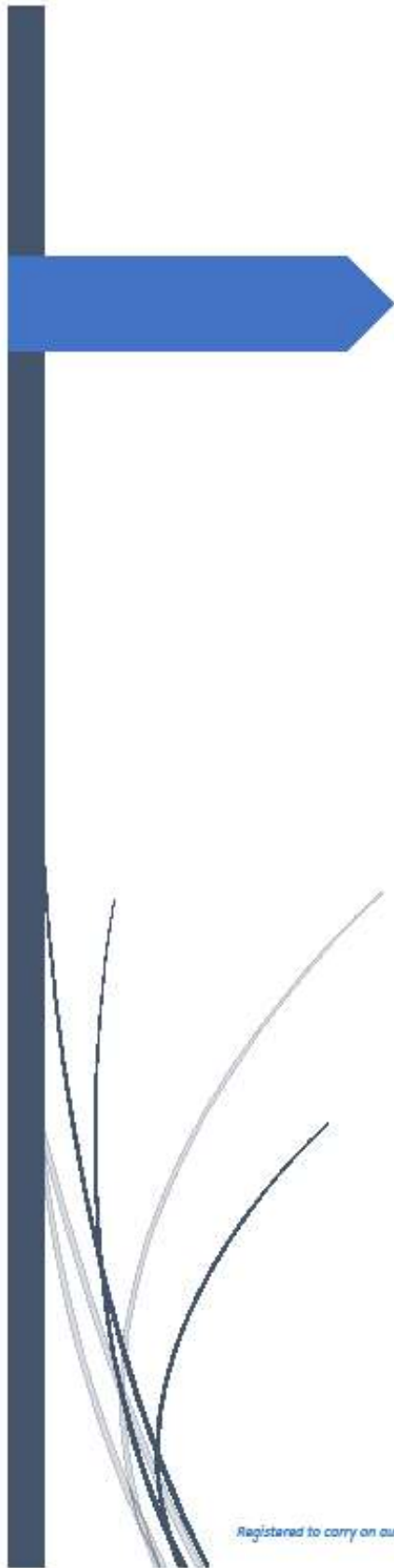
Payment of Accounts:						
Resolved: that the following payments be approved as the residual April 2024 and part of the May 2024 accounts						
Date	Ref	Payee	Description	Net	VAT	Gross
16.04.2024	DD	Financial Direct Fees	FD online charges - 01.03.2024 to 31.03.2024	£ 39.80		£ 39.80
17.04.2024	DD	Allstar	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 renewal	£ 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 Councils	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 wastewater 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 E'ee £1,032.75 E'er £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 Account since 7th May 2024

Date	Ref	Payee	Description	Net	VAT	Gross
08.05.2024	DD	Allstar	Fuel (vans and equipment)	£ 74.06	£ 14.81	£ 88.87
09.05.2024	DD	British Gas	Parkers Farm gas 22 March 24 to 23 April 24	£ 76.72	£ 3.83	£ 80.55
13.05.2024	DD	Waterplus	Water/w astew ater services (4083867607)	£ 85.69		£ 85.69
15.05.2024	DD	ASL	Photocopying charges	£ 39.85	£ 7.97	£ 47.82
15.05.2024	DD	Allstar	Fuel (vans and equipment)	£ 85.32	£ 17.06	£ 102.38
15.05.2024	DD	Financial Direct Fees	FD online charges - 01.04.2024 to 30.04 .2024	£ 40.80		£ 40.80
16.05.2024	DD	Avoira	IT support, backups, internet services (4 x inv.) May 2024	£ 237.81	£ 47.56	£ 285.37
16.05.2024	*	Elite Industrial Supplies (aka HiVis)	Workwear and PPE (inc. items for new staff member)	£ 180.13	£ 36.03	£ 216.16
22.05.2024	DD	Allstar	Fuel (vans and equipment)	£ 33.11	£ 6.62	£ 39.73
24.05.2024	*	J&K Ross Ltd	Safety boots (ppe) HE	£ 40.32	£ 8.06	£ 48.38
24.05.2024	*	Black Box Security	Fire Extinguisher Annual Service and Fire Blanket Inspection	£ 139.90	£ 27.98	£ 167.88
24.05.2024	*	CMUK Visual Safety Ltd (t/a Eureka)	3 x critical injury (bleed) kit - single use	£ 156.00	£ 31.20	£ 187.20
24.05.2024	*	Black Box Security	6 monthly commercial fire maintenance and 6 monthly emergency lighting maintenance contracts, and a replacement battery	£ -		
29.05.2024	*	Premiclean	May office cleaning service (with credits for bank holidays)	£ 370.87	£ 74.17	£ 445.04
29.05.2024	DD	Allstar	Fuel (vans and equipment)	£ 84.64	£ 16.93	£ 101.57
30.05.2024	DD	Firstcom Europe	Phone charges (May 2024)	£ 60.90	£ 12.18	£ 73.08
30.05.2024	DD	James Todd	April 2024 payroll fee	£ 58.00	£ 11.60	£ 69.60
30.05.2024	DD	O2	New mobile phone, adaptor and cables and monthly contract (Awaiting formal O2 invoice - VAT amount may change)	£ -		
31.05.2024	DD	LEVL	Geotab Pro Plus (in advance - June 2024 monthly subscription)	£ 30.00	£ 6.00	£ 36.00
31.02.2024	DD	Viking	Transfer files and A5 notebooks	£ 65.95	£ 13.19	£ 79.14
03.06.2024	DD	Waterplus	Water and w astew ater services (4083868280)	£ 25.46		£ 25.46
03.06.2024	DD	B&Q Trade Account (Screw fix)	Fence stain (planters), plant food and basket plants	£ 55.37	£ 11.07	£ 66.44
04.06.2024	DD	Legal and General	Ill health insurance	£ 161.09		£ 161.09
04.06.2024	*	Wynchcote	One month Joomla! Support and hosting	£ 73.00		£ 73.00
05.06.2024	DD	SSE	Electricity - Parkers Farm (15/11/23 to 14/05/24)	£ 397.60	£ 19.88	£ 417.48
05.06.2024	DD	Allstar	Fuel (vans and equipment)	£ 51.93	£ 10.39	£ 62.32
06.06.2024	*	Defibstore	Adult pads and battery pack for defibrillator	£ 140.00	£ 28.00	£ 168.00
06.06.2024	*	Reimb C. Caddock	Amazon - 4-way service utility keys (for w aste bins)	£ 9.48	£ 1.92	£ 11.40
06.06.2024	*	Reimb C. Caddock	Amazon - 10 x A6 notebooks	£ 11.84	£ 2.37	£ 14.21
06.06.2024	*	Reimb C. Caddock	K-Mart Wholesale Limited - large nitrile gloves (ppe)	£ 14.16	£ 2.83	£ 16.99
06.06.2024	*	Reimb C. Caddock	K-Mart Wholesale Limited - medium nitrile gloves (ppe)	£ 20.82	£ 4.17	£ 24.99
06.06.2024	*	Reimb C. Caddock	Reeknokol - stickers for planners	£ 13.83	£ 2.77	£ 16.60
07.06.2024	*	JDH Business Services Ltd.	Year end internal audit 2023/2024	£ 422.00	£ 84.40	£ 506.40
07.06.2024	*	Staff wages June 2024	9 staff	£ 15,381.48		£15,381.48
08.06.2024	*	Reimb. F. McDonald	Petty Cash float reimbursement	£ 100.00		£ 100.00
10.06.2024	*	Risley MOT & Truck Ltd.	Diagnostics and repairs to SC19 TYF (ABS reluctor ring)	£ 127.50	£ 25.50	£ 153.00
12.06.2024	DD	Waterplus	Water/w astew ater services (4083867607)	£ 85.69		£ 85.69
12.06.2024	DD	Allstar	Fuel (vans and equipment)	£ 76.17	£ 15.23	£ 91.40
14.06.2024	*	Elite Industrial Supplies	Workwear	£ 98.89	£ 19.78	£ 118.67
14.06.2024	*	Parish Online	New website May 28 2024 - May 28 2025	£ 425.00	£ 85.00	£ 510.00
14.06.2024	*	Cheshire Pension Fund	Pension conts. re: April 2024 E'ee £1,130.72 E'er £3,759.76	£ 4,890.48		£ 4,890.48
14.06.2024	*	HMRC	Tax £1,531.40 NI £ 2,135.21 (6 May 2024 to 5 June 2024)	£ 3,883.58		£ 3,883.58
16.06.2024	DD	ASL	Photocopying charges	£ 73.92	£ 14.78	£ 88.70

Payments of accounts for approval at the June 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	tbc		
	DD	Waterplus	Water and w astew ater services (4083868280)	£ 32.80		£ 32.80
	DD	Waterplus	Water/w astew ater services (4083867607)	£ 85.69		£ 85.69
	DD	Avoira	Cloud SAAS Protection - one additional month	£ 33.41	£ 6.68	£ 40.09
	DD	James Todd	May 2024 payroll fee	£ 65.25	£ 13.05	£ 78.30
	DD	E-on	Electricity - Locking Stumps multi-use games area	£ 36.35	£ 1.82	£ 38.17
	*	Premiclean	June office cleaning service	£ 482.13	£ 96.43	£ 578.56
	*	Earth Anchor	Bespoke notice board for Oakwood	£ 885.00	£ 177.00	£ 1,062.00
	*	Hollis Electrical & Security Services	Phase 3 LED upgrade - the barn lighting (41 units)	£ 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	ASL	Photocopying charges	£ 24.98	£ 5.00	£ 29.98
	DD	Financial Direct Fees	FD online charges - 01.05.2024 to 31.05.2024	£ 39.80		£ 39.80
	DD	Direct365	Hygiene disposal bin and Duty of Care documentation (annual charge)	£ 135.18	£ 27.04	£ 162.22
	DD	LEVL	Geotab Pro Plus (in advance - July monthly subscription)	£ 30.00	£ 6.00	£ 36.00
	*	Derek Smith & Sons	Hanging baskets and plants + compost	£ 636.70	£ 127.34	£ 764.04
	*	Elite Industrial Supplies	Workwear	£ 98.89	£ 19.78	£ 118.67
	DD	ASL	Photocopying charges	£ 24.98	£ 5.00	£ 29.98
	*	S&S Marquees Limited	Grant ref B/W Carnival - marquee, table and chair hire	£ 2,117.80	£ 423.56	£ 2,541.36
	*	Swift Loos	Grant - Portaloo Birchwood Carnival	£ 600.00	£ 120.00	£ 720.00
	*	Cheshire Pension Fund	Pension conts. re: April 2024 E'ee £1,144.82 E'er £3,808.98	£ 4,953.80		£ 4,953.80
	*	HMRC	Tax £1,532.60 NI £ 2,405.16 (6 June 2024 to 5 July 2024)	£ 3,937.76		£ 3,937.76
	DD	Allstar	Fuel (vans and equipment)	£ 134.29	£ 26.86	£ 161.15
	*	Black Box Group (previously ES)	2 x replacement fire extinguishers for vans & 2 x disposal	£ 70.00	£ 14.00	£ 84.00



Birchwood Town Council

Internal Audit 2023/24

JDH BUSINESS SERVICES LTD

Registered to carry on audit work by the Institute of Chartered Accountants in England and Wales

The internal audit of Birchwood Town Council was carried out by undertaking the following tests as specified in the AGAR Annual Return for Local Councils in England:

- Checking that books of account have been properly kept throughout the year
- Checking a sample of payments to ensure that the Council's financial regulations have been met, payments are supported by invoices, expenditure is approved, and VAT is correctly accounted for
- Reviewing the Council's risk assessment and ensuring that adequate arrangements are in place to manage all identified risks
- Verifying that the annual precept request is the result of a proper budgetary process; that budget progress has been regularly monitored and that the council's reserves are appropriate
- Checking income records to ensure that the correct price has been charged, income has been received, recorded and promptly banked and VAT is correctly accounted for
- Reviewing petty cash records to ensure payments are supported by receipts, expenditure is approved and VAT is correctly accounted for
- Checking that salaries to employees have been paid in accordance with Council approvals and that PAYE and NI requirements have been properly applied
- Checking the accuracy of the asset and investments registers
- Testing the accuracy and timeliness of periodic and year-end bank account reconciliation(s)
- Review of year end financial statements
- The authority has complied with the publication requirements for the prior year AGAR.
- The authority correctly provided for a period for the exercise of public rights for the prior year AGAR
- The authority published required information on a website up to date at the time of the internal audit in accordance with relevant legislation.

The interim internal audit provides evidence to support the annual internal audit conclusion on the Annual Return for local councils.

Conclusion

On the basis of the internal audit work carried out, which was limited to the tests indicated above, in our view the council's system of internal controls is in place, adequate for the purpose intended and effective, subject to the recommendations reported in the action plan overleaf. As part of the internal audit work for the next financial year we will follow up all recommendations included in the action plan.

JDH Business Services Limited

Registered to carry on audit work by the Institute of Chartered Accountants in England and Wales

ISSUE	RECOMMENDATION	FOLLOW UP
2023/24 year end internal audit		
<p>1 The draft accounts presented for internal audit were incorrect as follows:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The 'balances carried forward' and 'other payments' in the AGAR were incorrect as the balances per the bank reconciliation had been inserted in box 7. and payments instead of expenditure in box 6. - The supporting analysis to expenditure was incorrect as the total included payments, rather than expenditure as adjusted via the extended trial balance. 	<p><i>The year end accounts preparation should be subject to a review before finalising the AGAR figures to ensure the audit trail is accurate from the receipts and payments accounts through to the extended trial balance, the balance sheet and the income and expenditure accounts.</i></p> <p>NB The draft account were amended to include the corrected figures in the final AGAR accounts.</p>	
2023/24 interim internal audit		
<p>1 We could not identify the following information published on the council website as prescribed in the Transparency Code: <i>PUBLICATION 32. Local authorities must also publish details of any contract, commissioned activity, purchase order,</i></p>	<p><i>The council should ensure the website is maintained up to date and that it complies fully with the publication requirements of the Local Authority Transparency Code 2015.</i></p>	

	ISSUE	RECOMMENDATION	FOLLOW UP
	<p><i>framework agreement and any other legally enforceable agreement with a value that exceeds £5,000. For each contract, the following details must be published:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>reference number</i> - <i>title of agreement</i> - <i>LA department responsible</i> - <i>description of the goods and/or services being provided</i> - <i>supplier name and details</i> - <i>sum to be paid over the length of the contract or the estimated annual spending or budget for the contract</i> - <i>Value Added Tax that cannot be recovered</i> - <i>start, end and review dates</i> - <i>whether or not the contract was the result of an invitation to quote or a published invitation to tender, and</i> - <i>whether or not the supplier is a small or medium sized enterprise and/or a voluntary or community sector organisation and where it is, provide the relevant registration number</i> 		
2	<p>The council purchased a tipper truck which was just below the tendering threshold but above the requirements for three quotations in the Financial Regulations. However, the procurement</p>	<p><i>Minutes should record exemption(s) relied upon in the Financial Regulations where standard required procurement procedures have not been applied. If no exemptions are relied upon then the</i></p>	

	ISSUE	RECOMMENDATION	FOLLOW UP
	<p>was not underpinned by three quotations as required by the Financial Regulations where no exemption has been applied and the minutes do not reference which exemption(s) in the Financial Regulations have been applied.</p>	<p><i>standard contracting requirements of the Financial Regulations should be applied.</i></p>	
3	<p>We note there was no formal adopted budget timetable in place evidencing the key milestones leading to the agreement of the 2023/24 precept request for the year and approval of the annual budget.</p>	<p><i>A comprehensive formal budget timetable should be established annually covering the main elements of the Council's budget setting process together with key dates and responsibilities.</i></p> <p><i>NB The council is already addressing this issue with the adoption of a formal timetable for the 2024/25 precept and budget setting process.</i></p>	

Annual Internal Audit Report 2023/24

Birchwood Town Council

www.birchwoodtowncouncil.org.uk

During the financial year ended 31 March 2024, this authority's internal auditor acting independently and on the basis of an assessment of risk, carried out a selective assessment of compliance with the relevant procedures and controls in operation and obtained appropriate evidence from the authority.

The internal audit for 2023/24 has been carried out in accordance with this authority's needs and planned coverage. On the basis of the findings in the areas examined, the internal audit conclusions are summarised in this table. Set out below are the objectives of internal control and alongside are the internal audit conclusions on whether, in all significant respects, the control objectives were being achieved throughout the financial year to a standard adequate to meet the needs of this authority.

Internal control objective	Yes	No	Not covered**
	A. Appropriate accounting records have been properly kept throughout the financial year.	✓	
B. This authority complied with its financial regulations, payments were supported by invoices, all expenditure was approved and VAT was appropriately accounted for.	✓		
C. This authority assessed the significant risks to achieving its objectives and reviewed the adequacy of arrangements to manage these.	✓		
D. The precept or rates requirement resulted from an adequate budgetary process; progress against the budget was regularly monitored; and reserves were appropriate.	✓		
E. Expected income was fully received, based on correct prices, properly recorded and promptly banked; and VAT was appropriately accounted for.	✓		
F. Petty cash payments were properly supported by receipts, all petty cash expenditure was approved and VAT appropriately accounted for.	✓		
G. Salaries to employees and allowances to members were paid in accordance with this authority's approvals, and PAYE and NI requirements were properly applied.	✓		
H. Asset and investments registers were complete and accurate and properly maintained.	✓		
I. Periodic bank account reconciliations were properly carried out during the year.	✓		
J. Accounting statements prepared during the year were prepared on the correct accounting basis (receipts and payments or income and expenditure), agreed to the cash book, supported by an adequate audit trail from underlying records and where appropriate debtors and creditors were properly recorded.	✓		
K. If the authority certified itself as exempt from a limited assurance review in 2022/23, it met the exemption criteria and correctly declared itself exempt. (If the authority had a limited assurance review of its 2022/23 AGAR tick 'not covered')	N/A		
L. The authority published the required information on a website/webpage up to date at the time of the internal audit in accordance with the relevant legislation.	✓		
M. In the year covered by this AGAR, the authority correctly provided for a period for the exercise of public rights as required by the Accounts and Audit Regulations (during the 2023-24 AGAR period, were public rights in relation to the 2022-23 AGAR evidenced by a notice on the website and/or authority approved minutes confirming the dates set).	✓		
N. The authority has complied with the publication requirements for 2022/23 AGAR (see AGAR Page 1 Guidance Notes).	✓		
O. (For local councils only) Trust funds (including charitable) – The council met its responsibilities as a trustee.	Yes	No	Not applicable
			✓

For any other risk areas identified by this authority adequate controls existed (list any other risk areas on separate sheets if needed).

Date(s) internal audit undertaken: 01/02/2024 and 31/05/2024
 Name of person who carried out the internal audit: JDM BUSINESS SERVICES LTD

Signature of person who carried out the internal audit: [Redacted]
 Date: 31/05/2024

*If the response is 'no' please state the implications and action being taken to address any weakness in control identified (add separate sheets if needed).
 **Note: If the response is 'not covered' please state when the most recent internal audit work was done in this area and when it is next planned; or, if coverage is not required, the annual internal audit report must explain why not (add separate sheets if needed).

Section 1 – Annual Governance Statement 2023/24

We acknowledge as the members of:

BIRCHWOOD TOWN COUNCIL

our responsibility for ensuring that there is a sound system of internal control, including arrangements for the preparation of the Accounting Statements. We confirm, to the best of our knowledge and belief, with respect to the Accounting Statements for the year ended 31 March 2024, that:

	Agreed		'Yes' means that this authority:
	Yes	No*	
1. We have put in place arrangements for effective financial management during the year, and for the preparation of the accounting statements.	✓		<i>prepared its accounting statements in accordance with the Accounts and Audit Regulations.</i>
2. We maintained an adequate system of internal control including measures designed to prevent and detect fraud and corruption and reviewed its effectiveness.	✓		<i>made proper arrangements and accepted responsibility for safeguarding the public money and resources in its charge.</i>
3. We took all reasonable steps to assure ourselves that there are no matters of actual or potential non-compliance with laws, regulations and Proper Practices that could have a significant financial effect on the ability of this authority to conduct its business or manage its finances.	✓		<i>has only done what it has the legal power to do and has complied with Proper Practices in doing so.</i>
4. We provided proper opportunity during the year for the exercise of electors' rights in accordance with the requirements of the Accounts and Audit Regulations.	✓		<i>during the year gave all persons interested the opportunity to inspect and ask questions about this authority's accounts.</i>
5. We carried out an assessment of the risks facing this authority and took appropriate steps to manage those risks, including the introduction of internal controls and/or external insurance cover where required.	✓		<i>considered and documented the financial and other risks it faces and dealt with them properly.</i>
6. We maintained throughout the year an adequate and effective system of internal audit of the accounting records and control systems.	✓		<i>arranged for a competent person, independent of the financial controls and procedures, to give an objective view on whether internal controls meet the needs of this smaller authority.</i>
7. We took appropriate action on all matters raised in reports from internal and external audit.	✓		<i>responded to matters brought to its attention by internal and external audit.</i>
8. We considered whether any litigation, liabilities or commitments, events or transactions, occurring either during or after the year-end, have a financial impact on this authority and, where appropriate, have included them in the accounting statements.	✓		<i>disclosed everything it should have about its business activity during the year including events taking place after the year end if relevant.</i>
9. (For local councils only) Trust funds including charitable. In our capacity as the sole managing trustee we discharged our accountability responsibilities for the fund(s)/assets, including financial reporting and, if required, independent examination or audit.	Yes	No	N/A
			✓
			<i>has met all of its responsibilities where, as a body corporate, it is a sole managing trustee of a local trust or trusts.</i>

***Please provide explanations to the external auditor on a separate sheet for each 'No' response and describe how the authority will address the weaknesses identified. These sheets must be published with the Annual Governance Statement.**

This Annual Governance Statement was approved at a meeting of the authority on:

25/06/2024

and recorded as minute reference:

107/24-25 (b)E

Signed by the Chair and Clerk of the meeting where approval was given:

Chair

Clerk

www.birchwoodtowncouncil.org.uk/AIL/ (updating to www.birchwoodtowncouncil.gov.uk soon)

Section 2 – Accounting Statements 2023/24 for

BIRCHWOOD-TOWN COUNCIL

	Year ending		Notes and guidance
	31 March 2023 £	31 March 2024 £	
1. Balances brought forward	303,771	373,807	Total balances and reserves at the beginning of the year as recorded in the financial records. Value must agree to Box 7 of previous year.
2. (+) Precept or Rates and Levies	367,625	376,816	Total amount of precept (or for IDBs rates and levies) received or receivable in the year. Exclude any grants received.
3. (+) Total other receipts	3,738	11,068	Total income or receipts as recorded in the cashbook less the precept or rates/levies received (line 2). Include any grants received.
4. (-) Staff costs	224,379	252,954	Total expenditure or payments made to and on behalf of all employees. Include gross salaries and wages, employers NI contributions, employers pension contributions, gratuities and severance payments.
5. (-) Loan interest/capital repayments	19,990	19,230	Total expenditure or payments of capital and interest made during the year on the authority's borrowings (if any).
6. (-) All other payments	56,958	110,955	Total expenditure or payments as recorded in the cashbook less staff costs (line 4) and loan interest/capital repayments (line 5).
7. (=) Balances carried forward	373,807	378,552	Total balances and reserves at the end of the year. Must equal (1+2+3) - (4+5+6).
8. Total value of cash and short term investments	373,446	377,808	The sum of all current and deposit bank accounts, cash holdings and short term investments held as at 31 March – To agree with bank reconciliation.
9. Total fixed assets plus long term investments and assets	591,368	615,564	The value of all the property the authority owns – it is made up of all its fixed assets and long term investments as at 31 March.
10. Total borrowings	72,000	56,000	The outstanding capital balance as at 31 March of all loans from third parties (including PWLB).

For Local Councils Only	Yes	No	N/A	
11a. Disclosure note re Trust funds (including charitable)				The Council, as a body corporate, acts as sole trustee and is responsible for managing Trust funds or assets.
11b. Disclosure note re Trust funds (including charitable)			✓	The figures in the accounting statements above exclude any Trust transactions.

I certify that for the year ended 31 March 2024 the Accounting Statements in this Annual Governance and Accountability Return have been prepared on either a receipts and payments or income and expenditure basis following the guidance in Governance and Accountability for Smaller Authorities – a Practitioners' Guide to Proper Practices and present fairly the financial position of this authority.

Signed by Responsible Financial Officer before being presented to the authority for approval

[Redacted Signature]

Date

31/05/2024

I confirm that these Accounting Statements were approved by this authority on this date:

25/06/2024

as recorded in minute reference:

107/24-25(c)

Signed by Chair of the meeting where the Accounting Statements were approved

[Redacted Signature]