

MINUTES OF THE PART II FINANCE, AUDIT & PERSONNEL MEETING OF
BIRCHWOOD TOWN COUNCIL,
HELD AT PARKERS FARM, DELENTY DRIVE,
ON TUESDAY 27TH JANUARY 2026, 6PM

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

Administrative Assistant – Mrs. H. Thomas

Apologies: Councillors Atkin (away) and Ball (health)
Clerk – Mrs. F. McDonald (health)

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.

Councillor Ellis – Birchwood Youth and Community Centre

The Chair welcomed those present, following which the Council observed a minute's silence in memory of Mrs Clare Caddock the Responsible Finance Officer.

310/25-26 **DECEMBER 2025 COUNCIL MEETING MINUTES**

Councillor Ellis **proposed**, Councillor Brereton **seconded** and it was **unanimously resolved** that: The Minutes of the Meeting held on 16th December 2025 be approved as an accurate record and signed by the Chair.

311/25-26 **DECEMBER 2025 PART I FINANCE, AUDIT & PERSONNEL MEETING MINUTES**

Councillor Brereton **proposed**, Councillor Ellis **seconded**, and it was **unanimously resolved** that: the Minutes of the Part I Finance, Audit & Personnel Meeting, held on 16th December 2025, be approved as an accurate record and signed by the Chair.

312/25-26 **DECEMBER 2025 PART II FINANCE, AUDIT & PERSONNEL MEETING MINUTES**

Councillor Brereton **proposed**, Councillor Simcock **seconded**, and it was **unanimously resolved** that: The Minutes of the Part II Finance, Audit & Personnel Meeting, held on 16th December 2025 be approved as an accurate record and signed by the Chair.

PROGRESS

313/25-26 **QUOTATION FROM TREETOPS DE-VEGETATION SERVICES**

Councillor Ellis left the room and took no part in this discussion or decision.

Prior to the meeting, a quotation from Treetops De-Vegetation Services Ltd was circulated to Councillors, in accordance with the resolution made at the December 2025 Council Meeting (Minute 292/25-26). The quotation totalled £1,325.00 plus VAT.

It was **unanimously agreed** by those present to accept the quotation and to arrange for the tree work to be undertaken at the earliest opportunity.

Action: Officers to inform Treetops of the Council's decision and arrange for the work to be undertaken.

NEW ITEMS

314/25-26 URGENT ACTIONS FOLLOWING THE PASSING OF THE RFO

Prior to the meeting, all Councillors were informed of the unexpected passing of the RFO, Mrs Clare Caddock.

Following this sad news, it was determined that many issues would need to be addressed as a matter of urgency.

(a) Closure of Office on Date of Funeral

Members **unanimously decided** that the Birchwood Town Council offices and operations will close on the date of Clare's funeral to allow staff members to attend and to pay their respects.

The situation regarding floral tributes is unknown at present, but information will be sent to Councillors once available.

(b) Death in Service

It was reported that the Cheshire Pension Fund have been notified of Clare's passing and this will be progressed in liaison with Clare's family.

(c) Key Personnel Cover

Officers have enquired with our insurers regarding Key Personnel Cover. We were informed that this cover would only apply if accidental death occurred.

(d) Delegated Powers

Due to the demise of the RFO and the long-term absence of the Clerk, it is necessary for the Council to delegate emergency powers to the Administrative Assistant, supported by three Councillors to act as authorised contacts for Worknest, to deal with any ongoing or new HR related issues the Council has.

It was proposed that Councillor Reeves, as Chair, and Councillors Atkin and Ellis be given delegated powers. This was **unanimously agreed** by those present.

Action Officers to liaise with Worknest to add the above Councillors as authorised contacts.

(e) Higher Level of HR Assistance

Members discussed whether a higher level of HR support could be obtained from Worknest, potentially involving increased resources and better-aligned staff support. It is not yet known what costs would be for such an increase.

After discussion, Members agreed that they would like to explore the possibility of enhanced HR support from Worknest.

Action Officers to enquire with Worknest regarding a higher level of HR support.

(f) Locum Support

As the Clerk is currently on long term sick leave and the financial year end is fast approaching, locum support is urgently required to process, prepare and submit the Council's year end accounts, amongst other things.

A preliminary job specification has been sent to the SLCC and ChALC to see if there is any locum support available to assist. It was noted that the locum would need experience working with Scribe accounting software and dealing with Subject Access Requests.

The Council **unanimously resolved** to engage the services of a locum, with Councillors Reeves, Atkin and Ellis given **delegated powers** to interview any 'applicants'.

Councillors believe that BTC will require the services of a locum for around six months, and it is our understanding that the cost is usually around £25.00 per hour, perhaps more depending on the level of experience and the basis on which the locum is paid.

Councillors enquired if neighbouring Town and Parish Councils might be able to assist, however, Parish/Town Councils vary in size and accounting requirements and many Clerks/RFO's are part time to accommodate their personal responsibilities.

The matter of hiring a new RFO was raised with Councillors as an operational concern as it will replace the need for a locum in the long term, however, Councillors did not wish to discuss this further at this time.

Actions Officers to send the Job Specification to the delegated Councillors.

Councillor Ellis was tasked with contacting other Councils to enquire if they have any resource to support us with this role.

Councillor Reeves will contact the SLCC and ChALC.

(g) Subject Access Request (SAR)

The RFO was in the process of collating information requested as part of the ongoing subject access request (SAR). She had asked for an extension for the request, which was originally due in December 2025, and had been given a deadline of 20th February 2026.

All BTC staff are aware of the SAR and were given consent forms for their data to be shared as part of this SAR. At this time **no employee** has given permission for their names or data to be shared with the employee requesting the SAR and have noted the exceptions under which they do not wish this information to be shared.

It was explained that the SAR is highly time-consuming and that officers have already devoted significant time to this matter, resulting in other work being delayed or not completed.

With the current resourcing challenges, advice is being sought from both the ICO and the Data Controller regarding this SAR.

As it stands any data of a legal or professional privilege nature are exempt.

Councillors discussed various options for submitting the Subject Access Request, including making a partial submission in good faith should no further extension be granted, or submitting the information previously collated by the RFO, who had been managing the matter.

Action Officers to liaise with the Information Commissioner's Office to determine the appropriate course of action.

(e) AGAR

It was noted that the year end accounts and the AGAR need to be submitted to the internal and external auditor by the deadlines. The AGAR/Governance statements are usually presented to Council at its June Meeting for verification/ratification. This is normally done by the RFO so the Council will need this to be picked up by the locum.

The Council might be unable to confirm compliance with Assertion 10 by the time the AGAR is due for submission as some Councillors have not yet undertaken the training and because of resource constraints there is still data to review.

It was noted that, in the absence of the Clerk, the Administrative Assistant can undertake most of the Clerking responsibilities; however, the statutory and financial duties of the RFO must be covered as a matter of urgency.

(f) Bank Accounts

BTC currently has two bank accounts. One with Nationwide, which is a deposit account and the other with Co-operative Bank, which is the main, operational account.

Currently signatories on the Nationwide account are the Clerk, RFO and Cllr Ellis. Following the demise of the RFO, there is a need for additional signatories to be added to the account.

It was **proposed** by Councillor Ellis, and **seconded** by Councillor Brereton that the Administrative Assistant and Councillor K. Dhillon be added as additional signatories to the Nationwide account. This was **unanimously agreed** by those present.

Once the Admin Assistant has been given authority, she will need to familiarise herself with the operation of the account as previously this was the RFO's role.

Action Officers to contact Nationwide to authorise the additional signatories and to remove the RFO from the account.

The current signatories on the Co-operative Bank account are the Clerk, the RFO, the Administrative Assistant and Councillor Atkin. Following the removal of the RFO as a signatory, and in light of the Clerk's current sick leave, and additional signatory should be appointed.

Councillor Brereton **proposed** and Councillor Ellis **seconded** that Councillor K. Dhillon be added as the additional signatory on the Co-operative account. This was **unanimously agreed** by those present.

(g) Administrative Assistant's Responsibilities

Due to recent events, the Administrative Assistant (AA) has been undertaking additional hours to help with the running of the Council. Her current contracted hours are 9am – 1pm but she has been working additional hours from 9am – 3pm, with the additional hours being paid as overtime.

As the role has evolved and she has been, and will be, taking on more responsibilities the Council should review the role grade and salary. The AA is undertaking iLCA training and her eventual promotion to Clerk is part of the Town Council's succession plan.

It was unanimously agreed that the AA's Job Title should be changed to Deputy Clerk/Deputy RFO which will more accurately reflect her revised duties and this change should be take effect from 1 February 2026. This change will necessitate a review of her salary, including a move from the Living Wage Foundation rate of pay to the appropriate spinal column point on the NJC salary scales. The Council will need to seek advice from Jackie Weaver ChALC to set an appropriate spinal point and salary.

It was **unanimously agreed** by those present to amend the Administrative Assistant's job title to Deputy Clerk/Deputy RFO with effect from 1st February 2026.

Action Council to seek guidance from ChALC regarding the appropriate spinal point.

Councillor Ellis suggested that the office hours are amended to take account of the fact that the AA will be the sole member of staff in the office. It was proposed that the hours are changed to 10am – 2pm.

This change was **unanimously agreed** by those present.

Action Officers to update the phone system, website and Facebook page to reflect these changes.

(h) Wages

It was reported that the February wages for staff and the pension return have been processed.

(i) Acts of Sympathy

The office has been in contact with Clare's family to request permission to include a brief, respectful tribute following her passing which would be included on our website, with the possibility of that then being shared across to our social media. The family responded that they felt this would be a thoughtful gesture.

As mentioned earlier in the meeting, information regarding flowers and donations will be sent to Councillors for consideration when it becomes known.

The Chair presented a card for Clare's family, which was signed by all Councillors in attendance. BTC staff will ensure the card is delivered at an appropriate time.

315/25-26 **ONGOING HR ISSUES**

The employee currently on leave due to [REDACTED]
Occupational Health assessment.

MediGold, the company conducting the assessment, [REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED].

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED].

Regarding the other employee on [REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

It was unanimously agreed by those present that as this is a necessary requirement of the insurance claim process, officers should arrange for the completion of this medical form to enable it to be considered.

316/25-26 **NEXT FULL COUNCIL MEETING**

The Chair reminded Members that the next meeting of Birchwood Town Council will take place on Tuesday, 24 February 2026. He added that, should any matters arise that cannot wait until the next scheduled Council meeting, an Extraordinary Meeting of the Council will be convened.

The meeting concluded at 7.15 pm