

**MINUTES OF THE PART I FINANCE, AUDIT & PERSONNEL MEETING OF
BIRCHWOOD TOWN COUNCIL
HELD AT PARKERS FARM, DELENTY DRIVE,
ON TUESDAY 26TH MARCH 2024**

Present: Councillor Sheridan in the Chair
Councillors Atkin, Bowden, Brereton, Ellis, Evans, Reeves, Scott, and
Simcock

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

3 members of the public

Apologies: Councillors Allen (away), Ball (personal), and Dempsey (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.

Birchwood Carnival Committee - Councillors Atkin, Sheridan and Simcock.
Birchwood Youth & Community Centre – Councillor Ellis.

363/23-24 **PAYMENT OF ACCOUNTS**

Members were asked to consider and approve the payment of accounts schedule – (see pages 225 and 226 below).

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

364/23-24 **FEBRUARY 2024 PART I FINANCE, AUDIT & PERSONNEL MEETING MINUTES**

Councillor Scott **proposed**, Councillor Brereton **seconded**, and it was **unanimously resolved** that: the Minutes of the Part I Finance, Audit & Personnel Meeting, held on 27th February 2024, be approved as an accurate record and signed by the Chair.

PROGRESS

365/23-24 **BENCHES**

The RFO stated that we are still awaiting a response from WBC and have no further update at this time.

366/23-24 **GDPR**

To note that the Clerk and RFO will review the Personal Data categories as soon as possible.

367/23-24 **LEGIONELLA RISK ASSESSMENT**

- (a) The RFO said that the water samples were collected and posted to a laboratory for testing on 18th March 2024. It may be two to three weeks before we receive the results.

- (b) The RFO said that weekly outlet flushing is taking place, as well as regular temperature testing, however the thermometer we had purchased to test the temperature has broken. We have ordered a new thermocouple model, to see if it gives more consistent readings. Currently recorded temperatures vary by a few degrees at several of the outlets from week to week.
- (c) To note that we have purchased four training courses for BTC staff, and will complete the training as soon as possible.

Action Clerk's office to continue to monitor the water temperature at both the hot and cold water outlets.

368/23-24 **WEBSITE**

- (a) Following the resolution of the Council to progress with a new '.gov.uk' website, the Clerk's office is liaising with a new provider regarding this matter. We cannot use 'btc.gov.uk' as it is not descriptive enough. We have therefore opted to use 'birchwoodtowncouncil.gov.uk'.
- (b) We submitted an application for £100 +VAT funding from the Cabinet Office to support our purchase of a gov.uk domain. This has been granted. This will be paid directly to our new website provider, and was accounted for in their quote.
- (c) Officers attended a 'Getting set up guidance' webinar on 11th March 2024. This was presented by 'The Parish Council Domains Helper Service'.
- (d) Correspondence was sent to our current website provider to inform them that BTC will not be renewing our annual contract with them when it would be due for renewal in May 2024. A response was received, and we are liaising with them regarding 'housekeeping' matters relating to cessation of the contract.
- (e) BTC has now taken ownership of our current domain name and will maintain it for a couple of years.
- (f) The Clerk's office has been in touch with the company who previously did the signwriting for our vehicles to enquire about the change of domain name on our electric vehicles. The company responded and said it would be a simple adjustment and kindly said that they would do it free of charge.

369/23-24 **BIRCHWOOD YOUTH & COMMUNITY CENTRE (BYCC) – PROPOSED FENCING**

BYCC would like to install some wooden gates and low-level fencing surrounding the patio area to the rear of the building. This would allow the Mums and Tots (and other groups) to use the patio area during the summer months, when it is warm enough for the children to play outside.

Fencing would be required to address the potential risk of children either getting into the car park area or up onto the grass mound that has very steep sides. The fencing need not be a permanent fixture, if sometime in the future it is no longer required.

Whilst the land is owned by BTC, BYCC has indicated that the cost would be wholly covered by BYCC. For more information, Councillor Ellis stated that BYCC has received three NISA funded grants which has allowed them to make improvements to the centre, and will also help fund this project.

Officers suggested that BYCC considers the following points prior to installation of fencing, if Members are in agreement:

- That the fencing be suitable / safe for young children – i.e. they cannot climb through it, on it, or get their heads stuck in it or get splinters, etc. Consider the use of some additional ‘netting’.
- That the gates be fitted so that fingers cannot be trapped in them.
- That the gates be fitted so that they cannot be opened by children, but can be quickly opened in case of an emergency.
- That the width of the opened gates will not hinder any user accessing the rear of the building.
- That care is taken by the installers that they do not damage or disturb any utilities during installation i.e. water pipes, sewage drains, gas lines, electricity cables and phone / internet cables.
- That there is no financial liability to BTC in relation to the above.
- That there is no access to the raised ground to the rear of the BYCC building for children.
- Regular inspection of the paving for slip / trip hazards to be undertaken.

There were no objections by those present, and Members **unanimously resolved** to allow BYCC to install fencing, as long as the above conditions are met.

370/23-24 **GENERAL MATTERS FOR REPORTING / NOTING**

- (a) To note that the second and final grant payment for the EV chargers was paid to BTC on 29th February 2024 following the resolution at the February Council meeting for a letter to be sent to the MD detailing the Council’s intention to take the matter to the Small Claims Court.
- (b) To note that one member of the Maintenance Team and the Administrative Assistant successfully undertook a three-day first aid qualification on 6/7/8 March 2024.
- (c) The PWLB payment due on 11th March 2024 (£9,520.00) has been paid.
- (d) An email was sent to Families United explaining why a grant could not be awarded to them, following their most recent application.

NEW FINANCE, AUDIT AND PERSONNEL ITEMS

371/23-24 **BANK ACCOUNT RECONCILIATION**

Members received the Town Council’s Income and Expenditure Statements and Bank Reconciliation Schedules for the accounting period 1st April 2023 – 29th February 2024.

The payroll figure for January 2024 was £13,101.80 (9) staff. The payroll figure for February 2024 was £13,573.10 (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 Brereton **proposed**, Councillor Ellis **seconded**, and it was **unanimously resolved** that Members are happy with the schedules as presented. These will be signed by the RFO and the Chair, following the meeting.

372/23-24 **ELECTION CHARGES**

The RFO stated that some information has been received regarding election charges for the upcoming May 2024 elections. This topic was discussed at the recent Parish Liaison Meeting, where it was confirmed that local Councils will have the option to pay over a number of years. WBC has to be informed by 1st July 2024 if the 'payment plan' option is something that the Council wishes to be put in place for BTC.

Members agreed that if this is an option, the Council would like to pay for the May 2024 elections over a number of years.

373/23-24 **IT PROVIDER**

- (a) The RFO stated that, following some ongoing issues that Officers are experiencing with current IT services and to 'test' the market for a proprietary service, the Clerk and RFO met with another local IT company to discuss potential alternative options regarding specialist IT services. Some options have been sent for consideration.

The RFO said that services provided would include rebuilding the desktops so that they sync better, including making it easier to login to different computers and the laptop. This would require an initial one-off fee of £850.00 as a set-up cost.

The RFO stated that the service quoted would not include the 'Helpdesk' feature, but the new provider is confident that with their latest updates to BTC's machines, we would not require constant use of the 'Helpdesk' like we do with our current provider. If we should require to use this service, it would be chargeable at a rate of around £70 – 100 per hour.

Councillor Atkin enquired about what issues Officers are having with the current IT set up.

The RFO briefly explained some of the issues we are having, not only with the IT, but with the general service being provided.

The Clerk stated that the alternative supplier would upgrade BTC to a Microsoft 365 Business Premium account which would also come with access to 15 email addresses, as opposed to the 10 BTC currently have. She stated that Councillors regularly have issues with their email addresses, and we have been informed that this should alleviate that problem. The Clerk also stated that the alternative provider has offered to liaise directly with the new website provider.

The RFO wanted it to be noted that the alternative company is jointly run by people who used to work for our current provider, one of whom worked very closely with BTC's account. They now run their own company. The RFO also made the Council aware that Officers approached them for alternative options, not the other way around.

Councillor Sheridan asked if the alternative provider was someone that Officers had previously had a good working relationship with and felt confident working with again.

The Clerk said that a representative of the alternative provider initially set up the BTC account and is very familiar with the Council's needs and requirements. We were always happy with their level of service and IT expertise.

Officers stated that they would appreciate it if any ‘tech-savvy’ Councillors could read through the proposal documentation, and highlighted that it is a time sensitive matter as part of our current provider’s contract is due for renewal on 30th April 2024.

Action

Clerk’s office to send over proposal documentation to Councillors Atkin, Ellis and Scott and for these Councillors to respond with any feedback as soon as possible.

- (b) To note that we have received an annual invoice (due for renewal on 30th April 2024) for one part of our contract with Avoira. We currently pay 4 separate invoices per month to our IT provider for:
- ESET security
 - Microsoft 365 Business Standard plus 10 email addresses
 - Hosted back-up to cloud
 - IT support for 3 devices

These currently total £237.81 +VAT per month.

374/23-24 **EXTERNAL AUDIT**

Information has been received from BTC’s external auditor, PKF Littlejohn LLP, regarding the preparation and submission of the 2023/2024 AGAR and supporting documentation.

The default submission deadline for their receipt of the approved AGAR and supporting documentation is Monday, 1st July 2024. Non-submission by this date will lead to chargeable chaser letters being issued (£40 plus VAT).

The RFO stated that Full Council will need to approve the relevant documentation at the June Council meeting, taking place on 25th June 2024, at the latest.

375/23-24 **END OF YEAR INTERNAL AUDIT 2023/2024**

The RFO has received the checklist from BTC’s internal auditor for the end of year 2023/2024 audit. One of the items on the checklist is for BTC to adopt a ‘Reserves Policy’. The RFO has written a draft policy which was emailed to Councillors prior to the meeting and a hard copy was handed out at the meeting for their consideration / approval.

It was **unanimously resolved** by Members present to approve the draft ‘Reserves Policy’.

376/23-24 **INSURANCE RENEWAL**

The RFO stated that we have received our insurance renewal from Zurich for £5,166.86. This is £429.70 less than last year. The insurance is due for renewal on 1st April 2024.

The RFO said that we could remove certain options from our insurance policy that we may not need.

Zurich offers an all-inclusive fully comprehensive insurance for local Councils. Other insurance companies that we have considered tend to offer ‘piecemeal’ policies to make up their cover.

Members **unanimously agreed** to go forward with the Zurich insurance renewal with all options included.

377/23-24 **ANNUAL RISK ASSESSMENT REVIEW (FINANCIAL AND OPERATIONAL PROCESSES)**

The RFO asked Members to consider for approval the amended/updated ‘Appendix C’ – Annual Risk Assessment Review (Financial and Operational Processes) March 2024. This forms part of the end of year accounting documents.

There would be an additional amendment added once the results of the Legionnaire’s Disease test is known.

Members **unanimously resolved** to approve the March 2024 updated Annual Risk Assessment Review (Financial and Operational Processes), with the additional amendment added, as noted above.

378/23-24 **GENERAL MATTERS FOR REPORTING / NOTING**

- (a) To note that information has been received regarding the pay claim for 2024/2025 that the three unions representing local government staff have submitted to the National Employers. The claim is for “£3,000 or 10%, whichever is higher”.
- (b) To note that the membership renewal invoice from ChALC is expected to be received in April 2024. ChALC has circulated some information detailing the benefits of being a member, for consideration. This has been included in Councillors’ meeting papers. BTC is currently a member of ChALC.
- (c) To note the change to employees’ Class 1 employee National Insurance Contributions, as announced by the Chancellor in the 6th March 2024 Budget, i.e. a 2% cut from 12% to 10%, will be implemented from the April 2024 pay cycle.
- (d) To note that the March 2024 direct debit monthly payment for Ill Health Liability Insurance appeared to be incorrect. There was an overpayment of £8.74 collected. This was queried with the company that supplies this insurance to BTC, and will be adjusted in the April 2024 payment. An apology was received.
- (e) To note that the weekly price for cleaning services will be increasing by £8.12 per week from 1st May 2024. This is the first increase since we have commenced the contract in January 2022. It reflects the company’s wages increases to their staff for April 2022, April 2023 and an upcoming increase in April 2024.
- (f) Received – HMRC Employer Bulletin – February 2024.
- (g) Received – notification that BTC’s Business Rates for 2024/2025 are NIL.

At this point in the meeting, the Chair thanked the residents for attending and explained that members of the public are excluded from further parts of the meeting, due to the confidential nature of items to be discussed in Part II finance.

The residents left the meeting.

This part of the meeting concluded at 6.55 pm

Payment of Accounts:

Resolved: that the following payments be approved as the residual January 2024 and part of the February 2024 accounts

Date	Ref	Payee	Description	Net	VAT	Gross
16.01.2024	DD	Financial Direct Fees	FD online charges	£ 40.00		£ 40.00
18.01.2024	*	Cheshire Pension Fund	Pension conts. re: Dec. 2023 Eee £1,146.41 Eer £4,119.06	£ 5,265.47		£ 5,265.47
18.01.2024	*	HMRC	Tax £1,879.40 £ 2,819.47 (6 Dec 2023 to 5 Jan 2024)	£ 4,698.87		£ 4,698.87
19.01.2024	*	St John Ambulance	First Aid at Work training (SM and HT)	£ 680.00	£ 136.00	£ 816.00
20.01.2024	*	E Siano	Reimb. Big Boots UK - Safety Boots (PPE)	£ 122.54		£ 122.54
22.01.2024	*	Risley MOT & Truck Ltd	HK64 NNM - replace wiper blade set, inc. jet washers	£ 57.44	£ 11.49	£ 68.93
22.01.2024	*	C Caddock	Reimb. Amazon - 200 x DL Envelopes (w indow less)	£ 5.72	£ 1.14	£ 6.86
22.01.2024	*	C Caddock	Reimb. Plastoreg Eastlight Ltd - A5 Reporter pads	£ 7.49	£ 1.50	£ 8.99
22.01.2024	*	C Caddock	Reimb. Amazon - pack of 10 A6 Notebooks	£ 12.05	£ 2.41	£ 14.46
23.01.2024	DD	E-on Next	Electricity - Locking Stumps MUGA	£ 11.07	£ 0.55	£ 11.62
23.01.2024	*	PREM Clean	Office cleaning services January 2024	£ 412.60	£ 82.52	£ 495.12
24.01.2024	DD	Allstar	Fuel (vans and equipment)	£ 133.35	£ 26.67	£ 160.02
24.01.2024	*	F. McDonald	Contribution - eye test - (VDU work)	£ 30.00		£ 30.00
29.01.2024	DD	BNP Paribas	Photocopier Lease	£ 170.00	£ 34.00	£ 204.00
30.01.2024	DD	Firstcom Europe	Office phone charges	£ 57.29	£ 11.46	£ 68.75
30.01.2024	DD	James Todd (Go Cardless)	Payroll services (December 2023 fee)	£ 59.40	£ 11.88	£ 71.28
31.01.2024	DD	LEVL	Geotab Pro Plus (in advance - January monthly subscription)	£ 30.00	£ 6.00	£ 36.00
31.01.2024	DD	Allstar	Fuel (vans and equipment)	£ 64.47	£ 12.89	£ 77.36
01.02.2024	DD	Waterplus	Water and wastewater services (4083868280)	£ 25.46		£ 25.46
02.02.2024	*	Birchwood Heating	Service gas boiler & clear magnetic filter	£ 85.00	£ 17.00	£ 102.00
02.02.2024	*	Direct365	Legionella Risk Assessment	£ 285.00	£ 57.00	£ 342.00
05.02.2024	DD	Legal and General	Ill health insurance	£ 180.59		£ 180.59
06.02.2024	*	Reimb. C. Caddock	Asda- air freshener	£ 2.08	£ 0.42	£ 2.50
06.02.2024	*	Reimb. C. Caddock	Travelmore - combination lock for barrier	£ 7.49	£ 1.50	£ 8.99
06.02.2024	*	Reimb. F. McDonald	Petty cash float	£ 50.00		£ 50.00
07.02.2024	DD	Allstar	Fuel (equipment)	£ 8.65	£ 1.73	£ 10.38
07.02.2024	*	February 2024 Wages	9 staff	£ 13,573.10		£ 13,573.10
09.02.2024	*	Two Tone Motors	MK17 FVC - repairs to o/s front wing and paint	£ 320.00	£ 64.00	£ 384.00
11.02.2024	DD	Waterplus	Water/wastewater services (4083867607)	£ 85.69		£ 85.69
12.02.2024	*	SAS Daniels LLP	Annual SAS protect Service (Employment Law Consultants)	£ 1,461.00	£ 292.20	£ 1,753.20
12.02.2024	*	JDH Business Services Ltd	Interim Internal Audit 2023/24	£ 370.00	£ 74.00	£ 444.00
14.02.2024	DD	Allstar	Fuel (vans and equipment)	£ 82.24	£ 16.44	£ 98.68
15.02.2024	DD	ASL	Photocopying charges	£ 15.54	£ 3.11	£ 18.65
15.02.2024	DD	Financial Direct Fees	FD online charges	£ 40.80		£ 40.80
15.02.2024	*	Warrington Borough Council	Rechargeable works 23/24 wildflowers	£ 599.00	£ 119.80	£ 718.80
16.02.2024	*	HMRC	Tax £1,475.40 £ 2,085.52 (6 Jan 2024 to 5 Feb 2024)	£ 3,560.92		£ 3,560.92
16.02.2024	*	Cheshire Pension Fund	Pension conts. re: Jan. 2024 Eee £993.50 Eer £3,608.78	£ 4,602.28		£ 4,602.28
16.02.2024	*	Elite Industrial Supplies	PPE and workwear	£ 359.18	£ 71.84	£ 431.02

Payments of Account since 16th February 2024

Date	Ref	Payee	Description	Net	VAT	Gross
20.02.2024	DD	Avoira	IT support, backups, internet services (4 x inv.) Feb. 2024	£ 232.11	£ 46.42	£ 278.53
21.02.2024	DD	E-on Next	Electricity - Locking Stumps MUGA	£ 10.91	£ 0.55	£ 11.46
21.02.2024	DD	Allstar	Fuel (vans and equipment)	£ 69.07	£ 13.81	£ 82.88
21.02.2024	*	Reimb. C. Caddock	Safewater Solutions - Legionella testing kits	£ 90.00	£ 18.00	£ 108.00
23.02.2024	*	PREMIOClean	Office cleaning services February 2024	£ 446.98	£ 89.40	£ 536.38
27.02.2024	DD	British Gas	Gas - Parkers Farm (23 December 2023 to 7 February 2024) Est.	£ 170.20	£ 8.51	£ 178.71
28.02.2024	DD	Firstcom Europe	Office phone charges	£ 56.15	£ 11.23	£ 67.38
28.02.2024	DD	Allstar	Fuel (vans and equipment)	£ 151.50	£ 30.30	£ 181.80
29.02.2024	DD	James Todd (Go Cardless)	Payroll services (January 2024 fee)	£ 59.40	£ 11.88	£ 71.28
01.03.2024	DD	Waterplus	Water and wastewater services (4083868280)	£ 25.46		£ 25.46
04.03.2024	DD	LEVL	Geotab Pro Plus (in advance - March monthly subscription)	£ 30.00	£ 6.00	£ 36.00
04.03.2024	DD	Legal and General	Ill health insurance	£ 169.83		£ 169.83
04.03.2024	*	HMRC	Tax £1,485.40 £ 2,161.55 (6 Feb 2024 to 5 March 2024)	£ 3,646.95		£ 3,646.95
04.03.2024	*	Cheshire Pension Fund	Pension conts. re: Feb. 2024 Eee £987.93 Eer £3,717.25	£ 4,705.18		£ 4,705.18
07.03.2024	DD	SSE Energy Solutions	Electricity Parkers Farm 15/11/23 to 14/02/24	£ 351.11	£ 17.56	£ 368.67
07.03.2024	*	March 2024 Wages	9 staff	£ 13,330.03		£13,330.03
08.03.2024	*	Reimburse C. Caddock	Hi-Tech Global Limited - 13 ft extendable cleaning pole for signs	£ 36.66	£ 7.33	£ 43.99
08.03.2024	*	Reimburse C. Caddock	Amazon seller - 5 pairs boot laces	£ 4.16	£ 0.83	£ 4.99
11.03.2023	DD	British Gas	Gas - Parkers Farm (8 February 2024 to 23 February 2024)	£ 69.04	£ 3.45	£ 72.49
11.03.2024	DD	Public Works Loan Board	Loan ref: PW487017	£ 9,520.00		£ 9,520.00
12.03.2024	DD	Waterplus	Water/wastewater services (4083867607)	£ 85.69		£ 85.69
13.03.2024	DD	Allstar	Fuel (vans and equipment)	£ 77.17	£ 15.42	£ 92.59
14.03.2024	*	Reimburse F McDonald	Petty cash float	£ 100.00		£ 100.00
15.03.2024	DD	ASL	Photocopying charges	£ 60.63	£ 12.13	£ 72.76
15.03.2024	DD	Financial Direct Fees	FD online charges	£ 40.40		£ 40.40

Payments of accounts for approval at the March 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 wastewater services (4083868280)	£ 25.46		£ 25.46
	DD	Waterplus	Water/wastewater services (4083867607)	£ 85.69		£ 85.69
	DD	Avoira	IT support, backups, internet services (4 x inv.) March 2024	£ 237.81	£ 47.56	£ 285.37
	DD	James Todd	February 2024 payroll fee	£ 59.40	£ 11.88	£ 71.28
	DD	E-on	Electricity - Locking Stumps multi-use games area	tbc		
	DD	Allstar	Fuel (office vans, equipment, mowers)	tbc		
	DD	Financial Direct Fees	FD online charges - March 2024	tbc		
	DD	British Gas	Gas - Parkers Farm (8 Feb 24 to 23 Feb 24 actual)	tbc		
	*	ASL	Photocopying charges	tbc		
	*	Cheshire Pension Fund	Pension conts. re: March 2024 Eee £996.42 Eer £3,660.08	£ 4,656.50		£ 4,656.50
	*	HMRC	Tax £1,476.80 NI £ 2,110.32 (6 March 2024 to 5 April 2024)	£ 3,587.12		£ 3,587.12
	*	PREMIOClean	Office cleaning services March 2024	£ 446.96	£ 89.40	£ 536.38
	DD	LEVL	Geotab Pro Plus (in advance - February monthly subscription)	£ 30.00	£ 6.00	£ 36.00
	DD	BNP Paribas	Photocopier Lease	£ 170.00	£ 34.00	£ 204.00
	DD	B&Q Trade Account	Wheelbarrows, shovels and brooms	£ 190.50	£ 38.10	£ 228.60
	DD	B&Q Trade Account	Hacksaws, blades, timber, rubble bag	£ 54.08	£ 10.82	£ 64.90