

**Acton Burnell, Frodesley, Pitchford, Ruckley & Langley**  
**Annual Parish Council Meeting**  
**Tuesday 11 May 2021**

**Clerk's report**

Items to note for this meeting:

**21.5.11.1.1 Investment Strategy, General Reserves Policy and earmarking funds**

JPAG guidance states that all Councils with funds over £100k must have an annual Investment Strategy and recommends that Councils with funds of £10-£100k consider having a strategy. As it is possible that we may cross this threshold in 2021/22 and very likely that we will in 2022/23, the PC needs to draft a strategy for this year. The Guidance allows for consultation with a financial advisor should Councillors need more expert help with investment options.

The Internal Audit (more details under AGAR below) identified that the Council is holding excess reserves and recommended that the Council should have a General Reserves Policy and should consider earmarking some funds to demonstrate that we are managing our accounts correctly.

I recommend appointing a Task and Finish Group to follow the guidance, investigate options and draft an Investment Strategy and a General Reserves Policy, including any recommendations for earmarking funds, to be reported for consideration by Full Council at the next meeting in July 2021.

**AGAR**

**21.5.13 Internal Auditor's Report**

The Internal Auditor's report was generally favourable. However, it did highlight some areas for improvement:

1. The PC needs to better demonstrate that it has followed the correct procedures on authorising payments. Therefore, the Chairman and preferably one other bank signatory must initial each individual invoice authorised on the payments list at each meeting, not just the payments list itself.
2. Existing provisions for monitoring budget were inadequate. This had already been raised at the March 2021 meeting and the Clerk is taking action to ensure that the budget is monitored closely this financial year and will report back on the budget at each PC meeting.
3. The PC is holding excess unrestricted reserves. It is recommended that the PC hold a maximum of 12 month's running costs. At year end we held £10,846 general reserves versus last year's revenue expenditure of £7,270. We are budgeted to overspend our precept this year; however, if we continue to hold reserves in excess of recommended amount, the Internal Auditor recommends reducing our precept requirement for 2022/23 in order to help bring the reserves level down. The auditor also said the PC should consider earmarking some of our restricted reserves for specific projects to help justify holding large funds. I recommend setting up a Task Group to draft a Reserves Policy to demonstrate that we have a strategy to manage this issue.
4. Some existing policies require reviewing. This will be undertaken at the APCM.

## **Finance**

### **21.5.20 Preauthorise payments**

I'm requesting that the PC preauthorise the following regular payments to be paid until the next APCM:

1. O2 – Clerk's mobile phone bill, direct debit currently £9.73 per month
2. Clerk's basic salary and home-working allowance, as stipulated by payroll documents, paid by BACS monthly.
3. ICO – data protection registration fee, direct debit £35 annually.

### **21.5.21 Clerk's additional hours**

I'm requesting approval to claim 54 additional hours covering the period 11 January 2021- 2 May 2021. See separate document for estimated breakdown of these hours by task. Most of these additional hours are attributable to handover, training, elections, and end of year AGAR/audit preparation. I am hopeful that once the AGAR is complete my hours will reduce and I should not need to claim additional hours at this level for the remainder of 2021.

### **21.5.22 Budget monitoring**

See separate Budget monitoring document. I am currently forecasting that we will go over budget on the following budget lines:

1. Insurance – the premium has increased by £6.81
2. Salary – due to the Clerk's extra hours outlined above

I'm asking the PC to authorise payment in excess of the budget on these items.

### **21.5.25 General Power of Competence**

The Council cannot become eligible without a CILCA qualified Clerk. I would like to gain this qualification but currently do not have enough time to undertake the training. I hope that I may be able to do so in 2022 once I am better adjusted to the job and should not need to work so many additional hours.

### **21.5.27 SLCC subscription**

I think it would be useful for me to join SLCC and request that the PC pays for my membership which would be £103 for the year. If agreed, the Council would overspend its budget for subscriptions.

## **PC Working Documents**

### **21.5.30 Insurance**

I have received our policy documents and invoice for insurance up to the end of May 2022 when our long term policy expires. We will need to get quotes for new insurance cover ahead of the 2022 APCM. It should be noted that the terms of our policy have changed so they do not cover any loss as a result of a communicable illness, i.e. any loss resulting from delays/cancellations etc. caused by the pandemic.

### **21.5.31 Code of Conduct**

NALC recommends adopting the new LGA Code of Conduct (see separate document). The PC needs to decide whether to adopt this new Code of Conduct or retain/review the existing Code of Conduct. SALC advises that the new LGA Code of Conduct incorporates a number of important appendices, tables and guidance which are especially important for councillors new to local government. N.B. SC is waiting to make a decision on whether to adopt this Code of Conduct for Unitary members until after the election.

### **25.5.32 Policies and procedures**

#### **32.2 Press/media policy**

The PC Standing Orders state that we should have a press/media policy which we do not currently have. I will draft one for consideration at the next meeting in July.

### **21.5.33 Highways Matters**

The potholes in Acton Burnell and Pitchford reported earlier this year are being filled by the Council. The blocked gully on the Ruckley Road causing flooding in Acton Burnell has been cleared. I have not heard back from SC re the road condition at the bottom of the hill in Frodesley and will chase this up before the next meeting.

### **21.25.35.38 Other planning issues**

I chased these up with SC and have received a response on the Home Farm Barns issue which was resolved by the owner submitting a variation order which was granted permission in September. However, I have not heard back on the remaining 2 outstanding enforcement issues. I will chase SC again.

### **21.5.41 Road signs and speed limits in Frodesley**

A parishioner from Frodesley has raised concerns regarding the above issue and will be at the meeting to outline them. His communication will be circulated to Councillors separately.

### **21.5.42 Community Governance review**

SALC recommends that PCs officially consider at a meeting whether they would like to see any boundary changes or changes to the make-up of the Council in the Community Governance Reviews to be undertaken later this year. PCs should inform the Democracy team at SC of their wishes, even if the PC decides that no changes are necessary. The Chairman has analysed the population make-up of the villages and does not believe that any changes to councillor distribution across the parishes are needed. If the Full Council agrees with this assessment, I will contact Democracy Services to let SC know the PCs position. Equally the PC can choose not to make any decision until further information is available from SC.

Prepared by  
Anna Morris  
Clerk and RFO  
May 2021