

Abbots Langley Parish Council

Council Offices
Langley Road
Abbots Langley
Herts
WD5 0EJ

16th July 2019.

To Members of the Finance and Administration Committee

Councillors Sara Bedford, Liz Burns, Ruth Clark, Jane Lay, Alex Michaels (Chairman) & John Swallow.

The next meeting of the Finance & Administration Committee will be held at the above address on Monday 22nd July 2019 at 6:00 pm, when your presence is summoned for the purpose of transacting the business outlined below.

The press and public are welcome to attend the meeting.

Tim Perkins
Clerk to the Council

AGENDA

1. **Apologies for Absence**
To receive and accept apologies for absence.
2. **Declarations of Interest**
To receive declarations of interest in items on the agenda.
3. **Public Participation**
To note if any members of the public have requested to speak at this meeting, in accordance with the Parish Council's Public Speaking Arrangements.
4. **To confirm the Minutes of the Meeting held on 29th April 2019 (previously circulated).**
5. **Committee Vice-Chairman**
To appoint a Committee Vice-Chairman for the 2019-2020 municipal year.
6. **Payment Methods**
To consider the report from the Clerk. (Clerk's report item 1.)
7. **Internal Audit**
 - i. To consider the report from the internal auditor. (Enclosed.)
 - ii. To review the effectiveness of internal audit. (Clerk's report item 2.)
 - iii. To appoint the internal auditor of the financial year 2019-2020. (Clerk's report item 3.)
8. **Budget Monitoring Report**
To consider the budget monitoring report for Q1 2019-2020. (Tracking and monitoring report enclosed.)
9. **Budget 2020-2021 Process & Schedule**
To consider the report from the Clerk and the Budget Preparation Schedule for 2020-2021 (Enclosed schedule).
10. **Risk Assessment**
To consider the Financial and Business Risk Assessment. (Enclosed risk assessment.)

Abbots Langley Parish Council

11. Community Infrastructure Levy Update

To consider the latest revision of the CIL tracking report. (Enclosed)

12. Election Expenses - May 2019

To consider the report from the Clerk. (Clerk's report item 4.)

13. Eco Audit

To consider if the Parish Council should carry out a further Eco Audit. (Clerk's report item 5.)

14. Clerk's Report

To note items on the Clerk's report not covered elsewhere on the agenda.

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Abbots Langley Parish Council
Clerk's Report - F&A - July 2019

1. Payment Methods

A brief discussion was held on the above at the April meeting of this committee. It was agreed that we need to move away from members coming into the office and signing physical cheques.

We are also increasingly finding suppliers and organisations that are no longer taking cheque payments.

Giving members access to Lloyds somewhat clunky approvals process would introduce security and governance issues.

The above was discussed at a recent Clerk's meeting. Some councils are starting to use Adobe Sign which provides a secure online method of approving documents, that would then authorise officers to make online payments. This comes at a cost, as even with public sector discounts, it is likely to be around £400/pa.

Google have just released in beta a similar product, this will work well with our email platform, which is hosted on Gmail and is likely to be much cheaper, if not free.

I will keep members updated.

2. Effectiveness of Internal Audit

Members are required to review on an annual basis the effectiveness of internal audit.

Scope

In 2017 Auditing Solutions provided a copy of their full work plan which members agreed. I have checked with them and the plan used this year is substantially the same as there have been no significant legislative changes. Also, as the Parish Council has received good internal audit reports, there are no areas that require any form of special review.

Members need to be satisfied that the quality of the reporting provided by Auditing Solutions and the depth and breadth of their audits is appropriate.

Independence

Members also have to be satisfied that Auditing Solutions are independent and detached from the process of preparing the Parish Council's accounts and that they have no commercial or other relationships with either members or officers of the council, beyond the fee-based arrangement for auditing services.

Competence

The auditors who carry out our internal audit are professionally qualified and hold indemnity insurance. They also have significant experience of auditing local councils so are aware of the legislative requirements specific to the sector.

Relationships

Officers are satisfied with the working relationship with Auditing Solutions, we are involved in the planning of audit and whilst we do not consider they are a "soft touch", their cooperative working style makes the sometimes difficult audit process more bearable.

Planning and Reporting

Audits are planned well in advance and areas of risk management are covered in the work plan.

The Chairman of this committee will meet with the audit principal later this year, without officers present, this will give both the opportunity to review the audit and current controls.

Officers believe that the current internal audit process is effective, thorough and cost effective.

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3. Appointment of an Internal Auditor

The papers for a previous external audit inferred that the PC should be appointing its internal auditor on an annual basis. If this is the case then I (and other Clerks) have missed a memo. There is a requirement to assess the effectiveness of internal audit, as above.

In case this does come up as an issue, appointment of the internal auditor is a standing item at this July meeting.

Auditing Solutions are the only company operating in this area that have the capability to provide internal audit services to larger local councils. Until new providers of internal audit services emerge, who are experienced in the specifics of local council audit, then officers recommend re-appointing Auditing Solutions as provider of internal audit services for FY 2019-2020.

The 2017-2018 Internal Audit Programme was approved in November 2017 (F&A min 270i). The programme is expected to be substantially unchanged for 2019-2020. Any significant changes to legislation, or best practice, which affect the programme will be advised to this committee.

4. Election Expenses - May 2019

Three Rivers District Council have submitted the expenses for the May elections. These fall within my delegated responsibility to approve. Given the challenges we had in the past with late presentation and confusing costing I thought it appropriate for this committee to review.

Parish Council Elections 2019 – Final Expenses Claim.		
Thursday 2 May 2019		
Name of Parish	Abbots Langley	
Number of Contested Parish Wards	6	
Total Electorate	15,840	
Total number of postal voters	2,056	
Fees	Net	VAT
Returning Officer's & Admin Fees	£720.00	£0.00
		£0.00
Pay & Expenses		
Presiding Officers' pay	£1,740.00	£0.00
Poll Clerks' pay	£2,160.00	£0.00
Polling Station Supervising Officers' pay	£150.00	£0.00
Counting staff pay	£750.00	£0.00
Supervising count staff pay	£125.00	£0.00
Accommodation & Equipment		
Accommodation costs – polling stations	£2,103.72	£0.00
Accommodation costs - count centre	£501.75	£0.00
Printing		
Costs of printing ballot papers	£921.30	£0.00
Costs of printing & delivering poll cards	£2,182.12	£0.00
Polling station stationery	£62.16	£0.00
Postage		
Postal votes – outward & inward	£217.48	£0.00
Other costs (Please detail any other additional costs)		
Postal vote issue & opening staff	£716.31	£0.00
Transport to polling stations	£159.50	£0.00
Security - The Count	£40.04	£0.00
TOTAL	£12,549.38	£0.00
Compiled by MJ Summerville: Electoral Services Manager Dated: 10 July 2019		

The expenses are below budget and an average cost of £3,000/ward is reasonable. Clerks around the county discuss their local expenses and it is sometimes difficult to compare, as costs vary greatly, particularly where low cost council owned building are used a polling stations. These expenses are at the lower end of those charged by other authorities and I recommend approval.

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5. Eco Audit

Links to the previous Eco Audit and follow up were emailed to members on 20th June and are copied below. If anyone wants paper copy then please advise.

The previous audit was carried out by Donnachadh McCarthy, members may find it useful to have a look at his website before the meeting. <http://www.3acorns.co.uk/>

<http://www.abbotslangley-pc.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/Eco-audit-Abbots-Langley-Parish-Council-Report-final-version-.pdf>

<http://www.abbotslangley-pc.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/Abbots-Langley-Parish-Council-Update-Report-April-2013.pdf>

The previous eco audit took up a very significant amount of officer time. It is not just the information gathering which was huge (years data on energy, fuel, water usage) and the time spent with the consultant, the actions that come out of the report took significant amounts of staff time to action.

6. Financial Grants

The grant to Watford Lions to support the costs of the Carnival and Fireworks (£2,000) was withheld pending receipt of the required Service Level Agreement report.

The report was received in May and the cheque to the Lions released.

7. Replacement of the Heavy Duty Triple (Grass Cutter)

This committee approved the above purchase at its meeting in April 2019 (min. 432).

The price at the time of the meeting was estimated as £31,000. Delegated authority was granted to me to finalise, as there was still some clarification needed on required options.

The final price was £30,324 (ex. VAT) net of trade in on the old machine.

Unfortunately, the old machine got to hear of its pending departure and threw some mechanical problems the cost to fix was £500.

8. General Insurance Renewal 2019

The above was discussed by this committee in April. (min. 430.)

For the benefit of members that have not served on this committee before. We use Came & Co a specialist broker that works with the local council and charity sector. It was agreed in April to move from Aviva our insurer for the last six years to a policy underwritten by AXA/Inspire.

There was a cost saving of around 5% from the Aviva quote and the coverage from AXA was broader.

The buildings cover represents over half of the premium. Although the sum insured across the buildings has increased by 4% in line with the RICS rebuilding costs index the risk premium across all buildings has fallen year on year by 5.1%. The exception being the Manor House building where the premium did rise as the rebuilding cost tipped just over £1m pushing it into a higher premium band.

Tim Perkins

Clerk to the Council

16th July 2019