

Notes of Financial Advisory Group Meeting - 22 July 2025

Members: Kevin Arnott (Chair), Clare Atkinson, Ray Kirby, Mark Harris, Louise Tarleton-Hodgson.

In Attendance: Clare Shinner (Clerk), Jan Hipkins (Audit Review Financial Affairs Advisory Group).

1. Invoices examined for the first quarter:
 - Invoice 23: Kidderminster Mirror and Glass, £117.67 (Replacement “glass” for the bus shelter)
 - Invoice 27: Zurich Insurance, £1162.39 (Town and parish council Insurance for 2025-26)
 - Invoice 28: Signtech, £101.40 (CCTV signs (MUGA and tennis Court) and overlay stickers for MUGA)

2. Bank Reconciliation v Bank Statements

The April, May and June reconciliations were presented to the meeting. No issues were identified

3. Budget Actual v Expected

The Budget Actual v Expected position at the end of Q1 was reviewed. No issues were identified.

4. Restricted Funds

5. Advance Approval of Regular Payments

In order to facilitate the timely payment of invoices in any month when the council does not meet the Finance Advisory Group recommends that the council approves the following payments. This will enable these invoices to be paid without approval at a council meeting provided that they do not exceed the maximum amount shown:

Payee	Frequency	Maximum Pre-approved Limit
Direct Debits		
Vodafone – Phone for Council	Monthly	25
Unity – bank charges	Monthly	10

YU energy – charges for the lighting on the green	Monthly	25
ICO subscription	Monthly	50
Fisher German – allotment rent	6 - Monthly	350
National allotment society subscription	Annually	60
Other regular payments		
Clerk salary and HMRC payments	Monthly	
Glebe mowing contract	Monthly	700
Simon Fox Maintenance	Monthly	400
Parish Lengthsman invoices		550
ROSPA play area inspection.	Annually	400

6. Other actions of first quarter

Please note that HSBC account is now closed

7. Finances 2024-25

- The annual Internal Audit Report was examined. No potential issues were identified other than the actions in the report. The Clerk provided a list of the outstanding actions which will be monitored during the year. The Advisory Group believes that these have either been closed or that steps are in place to close them.

In the case of B1 The Advisory group noted that they were satisfied that the CCTV contract had been obtained with due probity.

In the case of E2 “Allotments – the internal auditor has suggested that the Clerk should be managing the allotments” the group discussed this and noted that the Clerk manages the allotments working in conjunction with a councillor.

In the case of O, it was noted that the Councillor in question had been given a dispensation regarding this issue.

- The revised Reserves Policy and Internal Controls Policy were considered, and the Advisory Group recommends them to the Council for approval

8. Finances 2025-6

- The Advisory Group were updated by the Clerk on the inspection of the accounts period. A number of potential challenges by parishioners were identified but further detail is required before full responses can be given.

9. Unexpected expenditure 2025-6

- St James Church asks for donation to repair of clock either this year or next. They have had their £500 as budgeted for 2025-26.

The Advisory Group recommended that this be considered as part of the budget for 2026-7

- In accordance with the agreed position the Advisory Group recommends that the Clerk is paid for 15 additional hours for the period 1 April – 30 June 2025.

10. Corporate multipay business application

- In order for the Clerk to make payments on behalf of the Council it was recommended that they have a debit card on the Unity account.
- Unity do not issue debit cards. As an alternative they suggested that we apply for a Corporate multipay business card. This is not a debit card, but a credit card which is settled in full at the end of each month by a direct payment from the associated Unity account.
- In practice this card has the same financial impact on the council as a debit card other than the payment being taken at the end of the month rather than when the card was used.
- The Advisory Group recommends that an application is submitted on behalf of the Council.

11. Insurance Claim for the bus shelter

- The cost of repairing the damage to the bus shelter is £156.06. Whilst the shelter is insured the policy has an excess of £50 so the amount the council would expect to receive from the insurers would be £106.06.

- The Advisory Group discussed whether Council should submit a claim and took the view that because of the costs of claiming (Clerk's time) and the likely negative impact on future premiums this would not be in the Council's interests
- The Advisory Group recommends that the Council does not make a claim on its policy.

12. Second quarter of 2025-26

- During July a number of payments were made twice in error. Where this occurred, all monies were refunded in the same week other than in the case of Glebe contractors where the payment was credited to our account for the following month.
- To prevent this happening again the Clerk is changing the signatories to the Unity account so that in future:
 - i. Only the Clerk (and the Chair in emergencies) will be able to enter payments (Currently the Clerk, Councillor Atkinson and Councillor Arnott can enter payments)
 - ii. Two councillors will authorise each payment (Currently the Clerk, Councillor Atkinson and Councillor Arnott can authorise payments)
 - iii. In order to ensure that sufficient councillors are always available to authorise payments Councillors Kirby, Harris and Tarleton-Hodgson will be added to the list of authorisers.

13. Budget requests

- The Parish Council needs to consider budget for 2026-27 in November. In order for this to happen the Finance Advisory Group must consider the budget in their meeting in October.
- To enable this to happen all advisory Groups MUST submit their budget requirements by end of September.

14. Address of the Parish Council and associated risks and costs.

- Currently the postal address of the Hartlebury Parish Council is the office used by the Clerk in Droitwich. This office is provided for the use of the Clerk by another parish council. Hartlebury Parish Council do not contribute to the cost of the office.
- The amount of post has reduced over time and the address to of most relevance when dealing with bodies such as HMRC
- The current arrangement has a number of potential risks and these and possible alternative arrangements were discussed. As the Parish Council does not have a fixed abode most alternatives would involve using a councillor's address, perhaps the Chair's, rather than an address associated with the Clerk or asking another body, perhaps the Parish Hall Management Committee, to act as a post box for the Parish Council.
- The Advisory Group recognised the potential issues with the current arrangements but noted that any other solution also had risks and issues.
- The Advisory group recommended continuing with the current arrangements for the time being.

15. Risks regarding the engagement of solicitors re the potential leasing of the car park to the Parish Hall. It was noted that a close watch will be kept on the solicitors who are to be engaged (Painters) to ensure that the costs do not become unmanageable. It is anticipated that the majority of these costs will be funded by a reimbursement from the Parish Hall for the CCTV costs.

Date of next meeting: 20 October 2025