

## Policy & Resources Committee Meeting – 13<sup>th</sup> March 2024

### Agenda Item 6 – FINANCE

#### 6.1 FINANCIAL UPDATE REPORT

This report provides highlights on ETC's current financial position in relation to its 2023/24 budget. The report is supplementary to the income and expenditure report committee members have been provided with.

#### INCOME

**Hall hire** – overall, this income stream is on target. Income from RLCC and MPCC is in line with forecasts. Centrepont income is slightly lower than forecast, whilst the Interpretation Centre is slightly higher.

**Cemetery** – Income from Mays Lane Cemetery is on track to meet budget forecasts. Several funerals are already booked for March, these figures do not appear in RBS yet.

**Sports bookings** – This income stream is doing well and has exceeded predictions for 2023/24.

**Investments** – CCLA has provided ETC with a very good return on its investments. Interest received has exceeded the predicted figures for the 2023/24 budget.

Currently, the following sums are invested. These funds comprise of a combination of ear marked reserves and general reserves:

- PSDF-CCLA                      £1,630,000
- NS & I                              £100,805
- Barclays Premium Savings   £310,000

ETC also has an outstanding loan of £200,000 with the Public Works Loan Board.

#### EXPENDITURE

**Staff costs** – these are on track for the 2023/24 budget.

**Utilities** – Gas and electricity costs are within budget. Water charges, however, have been more problematic to predict. Castle Water, the water supplier to businesses, is notoriously difficult to deal with. It tends to issue estimated bills followed by refunds when challenged. ETC's Finance Officer has spent time trying to achieve an accurate picture of usage and costs at all our centres, this work is progressing.

**Maintenance costs** – overall we are below budget on this area of expenditure but budget figures contain an element of contingency planning as there can sometimes be unexpected issues arising where buildings are concerned. The Centrepont maintenance budget includes funds to cover the installation of the Bike Workshop, this work is outstanding. Repair work on the heating system at Sol Joel pavilion has been costly this year, this is mainly due to the system being poorly thought out when the pavilion was built. Going forwards, we shall be looking at replacing the system as part of the Net Zero project.

The bus shelter maintenance budget will be fully spent in 2023/24 – we have used a contractor to deep clean some of the most in need bus shelters and they have done an excellent job.

**IT** - RBS, the finance package, has come in over budget. The company was bought out and they increased costs after ETC's budget was set. Consulting with others, we still feel RBS is the best solution currently on the market for large town councils. IT support contract – continued poor service from our provider has led us to replace them with a new contractor, with effect from 1<sup>st</sup> March 2024. To ensure a smooth transition, the contract with the current provider remains in place until 31<sup>st</sup> March 2024. ETC's on site server has been replaced with an alternative solution owing to it becoming 'end of life'. Once the transition has been completed, the on site server will be decommissioned.

**Vehicles** – Overall, this budget is on track. As well as regular servicing and repairs, 2 vehicles have had cam belt replacements. The servicing of specialist vehicles has been booked, these costs do not yet appear in the I & E report.

**Grants** – despite advertising the availability of 2023/24 grant monies and receiving numerous applications, funds still remain available. Other parish and town councils have reported a general drop in requests for grant funds over the past 24 months.

#### EAR MARKED RESERVES

**Elections** – fully spent, we are now building up reserves in time for the next town council election.

**Cemetery extension project** – this budget will be fully spent over the next few months. Even though we are still awaiting agreement from the diocese that an area of the extension can be allocated to Muslim burials, we are working with CDS to finalise details including project management costs. It is likely that additional funds will be required to complete the project, the Cemetery Working Group will discuss this and report back to committee and Council.

**Youth work** – funds exist within both the staffing budget and the youth projects budget for youth work. Discussions with Berkshire Youth are underway and it looks likely that they will be able to support ETC with the delivery of this work. Further information will be provided as and when it becomes available.

**Bus shelters** – ETC has not yet been invoiced for the last 2 replacement bus shelters ordered as installation has proved problematic with the company appointed to do this. Work is ongoing to source a different provider, one who will be more reliable.

**CIL** – the Town Clerk is in regular contact with WBC's CIL officer to ensure that funds are spent appropriately and in a timely manner. Just over £22k will be put towards the Sibly play area replacement project that is underway. This will leave just under £33k in ETC's CIL EMR. A further £22k is predicted to be received during 2024.

Jo Friend  
Town Clerk

# Claire Connell MA, ACA, CTA

Chartered Accountant and Chartered Tax Adviser

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Mrs J Friend  
Earley Town Council  
Council Offices  
Radstock Lane  
Earley  
Reading RG6 5UL

6<sup>th</sup> February 2024

Dear Jo

## **Internal audit for the year ended 31<sup>st</sup> March 2024 – interim report**

Local councils are required to have an internal audit of their accounting records and their system of internal control by Regulation 5 of the Accounts and Audit Regulations 2015. I have made interim visits during the year in November 2023 and January 2024.

I will also visit after the year end to review the final accounting statements and risk management.

My internal audit testing was based on the guidelines included in the JPAG Governance & Accountability for Smaller Authorities: A Practitioners' Guide to Proper Practices. Initial discussions were held regarding the internal controls in place and a series of tests using the financial records, vouchers, minutes, previous audit reports etc were conducted to establish the effectiveness of these controls.

## **General Comments**

Overall, I have found that the accounts continue to be well maintained and the controls operate well.

Specific comments below are in the order of the headings in section 1 of the Annual Return. There are no significant matters or concerns that I need to draw to your attention.

## **Detailed report**

As part of the testing I checked:

### **A. Appropriate accounting records have been properly kept throughout the year**

- The accounts have been maintained in RBS Omega which is accounting software specifically designed for the parish and town council sector. The accounts are kept up-to-date and are accurate.
- Hall bookings and pitch bookings have been recorded in the RBS Bookings software which interfaces with the main accounting package.
- The Burials are recorded in bespoke software and invoices raised in Omega. Allotment invoices are raised in Omega, with standing information kept in a spreadsheet.

### **B. Council complied with its financial regulations, payments were supported by invoices, all expenditure was approved and VAT was appropriately accounted for**

A sample of payment invoices was checked to ensure that they had been approved, correctly paid and VAT treated correctly. No problems arose.

- Financial Regulations were correctly suspended to allow the Town Council to use the Borough solar panel scheme.
  - Quotations have been sought for a new play area using selected suppliers from the ESPO list and thus the use of Contracts Finder was not required.
  - The payment of grants was checked against grants award in the minutes.
- C. Council assessed the significant risks to achieving its objectives and reviewed the adequacy of arrangements to manage these**
- Standing Orders and Financial Regulations were reviewed. The Financial Regulations were readopted in July 2022 and revised Standing Orders were adopted in May 2022.
  - The annual risk assessment and insurance will be reviewed at the final visit.
- D. The Precept resulted from an adequate budgetary process; progress against the budget was regularly monitored; and reserves were appropriate.**
- The reporting of financial results and monitoring of actual against budget was reviewed. Financial updates are provided at the Policy & Resources meetings (and are emailed to all councillors). The budget spreadsheets also contained up-to-date information showing income/expenditure to date against budget.
  - The budget setting process for 2024-25 was underway during my autumn visits and the process was almost complete at the time of my January visit. Comprehensive spreadsheets had been used, which once again had been updated this year, and a budget working party had met once to review the proposed budget. The process appeared thorough and included consideration of levels of reserves that the Council needs.

**Observations:**

- Final out-turn against budget will be reviewed at the final visit.
- E. Expected income was fully received, based on correct prices, properly recorded and promptly banked; VAT appropriately accounted for**

Testing of income covered the following areas:

- The precept was agreed to Council minutes and bank statements.
- The rental income was reviewed
- Test checks were made for:
  - hall booking income
  - allotment income
  - burial income
  - fishing permits
  - pitch bookings
- The new VAT rules relating to the provision of sports and leisure facilities were discussed. The Finance Officer was corresponding with HMRC regarding the associated VAT reclaim during my November and January visits.
- The quarterly VAT returns were reviewed. A partial exemption calculation is prepared on a quarterly basis with an annual review, as required.

**Observations:**

- Two isolated errors were found during the testing of income but these were due to human error and they do not suggest that there are inherent problems within the income systems. One error was found in the hall invoicing where a booking had been set up without a charge being associated with it. A second error was a typographical error within an allotment tenancy agreement. This had not led to any errors in the allotment invoicing.

**F. Petty Cash expenditure supported by receipts, approved and VAT appropriately accounted for**

- Amounts being paid out of petty cash are small in number and value and are supported by receipts and petty cash vouchers.

**G. Payroll Salaries to employees were paid in accordance with this authority's approvals and PAYE/NI requirements were properly applied**

- The payroll is outsourced to a payroll company.
- A sample of employees were selected and their rates of pay checked. Deductions for tax, National Insurance and pension were also checked.

**Observations:**

- One minor query arose on the rate of pension deduction used for one employee and I recommended that this be queried with Berkshire Pension Fund. No other issues were noted during the review of payroll.
- The appraisals for all staff except the Town Clerk were carried out in 2023. The matter of the outstanding appraisal was raised at the P&R committee meeting in January 2024 and this is now being arranged.

**H. Fixed assets and investments registers were complete, accurate and properly maintained**

- The fixed assets register is updated during the year as new assets are acquired.
- The fixed assets register will be reviewed after the year end.

**I. Periodic and year-end bank reconciliations properly carried out**

- Monthly bank reconciliations are prepared for the main account, the business account and for the imprest account by the Finance Officer. These are reviewed by the Town Clerk and the Chair of the Policy & Resources Committee.

**Observations:**

- In my autumn visit I recommended that the CCLA deposit account be included within the monthly bank reconciliation and this was added to the December reconciliation statement.

**J. Year end Accounts**

- These will be reviewed at my visit in May or June 2024.

**K. Correct declaration of exemption from limited assurance review in 2022/23**

- Not applicable – the Council was subject to a limited assurance review in 2022/23.

**L. The authority published the required information on a website up to date at the time of the internal audit in accordance with the relevant legislation**

- This will be reviewed at the year end visit as recent discussions at the Internal Auditors Forum have suggested that the wording for this test may change at the year end.
- At the time of my January visit the website was missing a couple of sets of minutes but these have since been uploaded.

**M. During summer 2023 this authority has correctly provided the proper opportunity for the exercise of public rights**

- The Council provided the opportunity for the exercise of public rights for the correct number of days within the correct timeframe and this was advertised appropriately.

**N. The authority has complied with the publication requirements for 2022/23 AGAR (as per AGAR Page 1 Guidance Notes)**

- The Council published the notice of conclusion of audit and section 3 of the AGAR on the website before 30th September as required.

**O. The council met its responsibilities as a trustee of trust funds**

- Not applicable – the Council is not a trustee of any trust funds

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I trust that these comments are self-explanatory, but please do not hesitate to contact me if councillors would like further details. I should like to thank the Council staff for their assistance during my visit.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Claire Connell". The script is cursive and fluid.

Claire Connell

**Policy & Resources Committee Meeting – 13<sup>th</sup> March 2024**

**Agenda Item 7.1.3 – TOWN COUNCIL GRANTS – NEW APPLICATIONS**

To consider the following grant applications for financial year 2023/2024: -

<b>Organisation</b>	<b>ACER/Friends of Bulmershe Open Space</b>
Reason for request	To purchase a permissive path sign, post and postcrete to install on Church Road, Earley to indicate path across Bulmershe Field to Bulmershe Park/Town Lane.
Amount requested	£130
No. of Earley Residents	Anyone who uses Bulmershe Field/Bulmershe Park (ACER serves 1500 households)
Comments	2 <sup>nd</sup> application this financial year. Previous award was £492 for materials for work on permissive path. Permission for sign and work has been granted by WBC.

<b>Organisation</b>	<b>First Days Children's Charity</b>
Reason for request	To continue support to families suffering financial hardship. Free access to nearby Woodley Toy Library. Outreach work in Wokingham and Woodley. One to one coaching for families. Access to essential items including school uniform, beds, bedding, shoes, baby equipment etc
Amount requested	£1,500
No. of Earley Residents	635 children (previous application 321 children)
Comments	2 <sup>nd</sup> application this financial year. Previous award was £1500 for outreach work across Earley to help families meet the costs for uniform and essential items.

<b>Organisation</b>	<b>Loddon Valley Ramblers</b>
Reason for request	To install two signs (Earley Gate and Elm Road) on WBC land to indicate public rights of way. WBC are unable to install/fund the signs.
Amount requested	£165
No. of Earley Residents	400 rambler members (25% Earley residents) and any Earley resident wishing to use the public right of way.
Comments	1 <sup>st</sup> application WBC has given permission for the work

<b>Organisation</b>	<b>One Step at a Time</b>
Reason for request	Equipment such as toys, lights, sensory weighted jacket.
Amount requested	£248.63
No. of Earley Residents	Wednesday Session: - 4 out of 6 spaces are from Earley Saturday Session: - 3-5 out of 6 spaces are from Earley
Comments	1 <sup>st</sup> application. Business started in Sept 2023, so no financial history. Communication group for autistic children up to the age of 5yrs (with or awaiting a diagnosis).

<b>Organisation</b>	<b>Reading Male Voice Choir</b>
Reason for request	Towards costs incurred to stage and organise event on 8 <sup>th</sup> June 2024 at Trinity Church, with the aim of attracting more members.
Amount requested	£140
No. of Earley Residents	20
Comments	2 <sup>nd</sup> application for this financial year. Previous award £135 to help promote the group and the mental/physical benefits of choral singing.

Full application details will be provided to the Committee.

Members to **RESOLVE** as appropriate.

**NOTE:**

ETC's budget for Grants 2023/24:

Total: £40,000

Allocated: £25,548 (includes £600 sports award)

**Remaining: £14,452**

Dated: 5<sup>th</sup> March 2024



## ORDERS FOR PAYMENT - BY BACS TRANSFER

Number	Supplier	Purchase Description	Amount
6552	Air IT Ltd	Microsoft 365 Feb 24	£842.75
6553	Air IT Ltd	Managed IT Support Feb 24	£719.83
6554	Arnold Laver	IC Timber repairs	£23.68
6555	Brewers Decorating Centres	Paint for Bus Shelters and RLCC	£71.32
6556	Creating Technical Solutions	Battery replacement for Parks vehicle YK60UUJ	£259.20
6557	Creating Technical Solutions	Service & MOT YK60UTY	£277.86
6558	Creating Technical Solutions	Brake Repair YK60UTY	£285.60
6559	David Ogilvie Engineering	90L Bin Liners x 5 SJP & Paddick Drive	£480.00
6560	Frasers Office Supplies	RH Office Supplies	£361.86
6561	GLS /Findel Education Ltd	Blue fold Hand towels	£69.58
6562	IT QED	Migration of RBS & Cemetery Mgr to Azure remote hosting	£1,800.00
6563	Premier Office Supplies	Heavy Duty Office Stapler	£33.36
6564	Southern Maintenance Solutions UK Ltd	SJP Hot water tank repair	£180.60
6565	Tradepoint UK B&Q	General Maint items (RLCC etc)	£182.15
6566	Tradepoint UK Screwfix	Woodstain and sander Cemetery	£72.97
6567	Travis Perkins	MELNR Pathways 5 x Bags of Gravel	£402.00
6568	Travis Perkins	Credit for duplicate payment	-£241.20
6569	Web Marketing Matters	Website support Jan 24	£216.00
6570	William Luck	Planning Services Jan 24	£365.10

Total: £6,402.66

Date Prepared: 07/02/2024

**ORDERS FOR PAYMENT - BY DIRECT DEBIT**

January 2024

Number	Supplier	Purchase Description	Amount
6571	Allstar Buisness Solutions Ltd	Vehicle Fuel Maintenance YSO6BSO Dec 23	£97.26
6572	Allstar Buisness Solutions Ltd	Vehicle Fuel Parks YK60UUJ Dec 23	£74.51
6573	BT	SJP CCTV phone Qtr to 29/02/24	£43.20
6574	Castle Water	SJP Water supply October 23 Credit Note (accurate Meter read)	-£152.12
6575	Castle Water	SJP Water supply November 23	£97.31
6576	Castle Water	SJP Water supply December 23	£102.10
6577	Castle Water	MPCC Water supply Dec 23	£166.73
6578	Castle Water	IC Water supply Dec 23	£55.70
6579	Castle Water	RLCC Water supply Jan 24	£20.11
6580	Castle Water	CEM Water supply Dec 23	£98.67
6581	Castle Water	RH Water supply Jan 24	£136.99
6582	Culligan UK Ltd	SJP Water Cooler Dec 23 +5 Bottles	£160.47
6583	Culligan UK Ltd	RH Water Cooler Dec 23	£100.74
6584	Elavon	Credit card terminal rental Dec 23	£22.80
6585	Focus Group	RH Telephone line rental Jan 24 & calls Nov 23	£188.27
6586	O2	Mobile phones December 23	£241.33
6587	Regent Gas Ltd	Gas supply RH Dec 23	£323.60
6588	Regent Gas Ltd	Gas supply SJP Dec 23	£734.52
6589	Regent Gas Ltd	Gas supply MPCC Dec 23	£1,183.58
6590	Regent Gas Ltd	Gas supply RLCC Dec 23	£1,253.26
6591	SSE	RLCC Electric Nov 23	£402.75
6592	SSE	Street Lighting Electric Nov 23	£551.32
6593	SSE	RH Electric 10/11/23-11/12/23	£517.56
6594	Virgin Media	Internet Jan 24	£51.60
6595	Wokingham Borough Council	MPCC Rates January 24	£228.00
6596	Wokingham Borough Council	RLCC Rates January 24	£469.00
6597	Wokingham Borough Council	RH Rates January 24	£1,572.00
Total Direct Debits			£8,741.26

Date Prepared:

09/02/2024

January 2024 Barclaycard

**ORDERS FOR PAYMENT - BY BARCLAYCARD**

Number	Supplier	Purchase Description	Amount
6598	Amazon - Shenzhen	Tablecloths Mayors Reception	£19.31
6599	Amazon - Alfasun	Serviettes Mayors Reception	£5.89
6600	Iceland	Cakes Mayors Reception	£27.62
6601	ASDA	Wine/Drinks/Cakes etc Mayors Reception	£87.80
6602	ASDA	Add'l Wine/Cakes etc Mayors Reception	£31.00
6603	Zoom	Subscription Jan 24	£15.59
6604	Sainsbury's	Lake Engineer Retirement Gift	£50.00
6605	Royal Mail	Stamps	£75.00
6606	Connecting Communities in Berks.	Community Halls Conference - Max Brown	£12.50
6607	Baker Ross	2x4 Wooden Birdhouses	£24.85
6608	Longacres	20x Bird Boxes	£165.79
Total Barclaycard			£515.35

Date Prepared: 13/02/2023

**ORDERS FOR PAYMENT - BY DIRECT CREDIT SSE**

**4/9/2023**

Number	Supplier	Purchase Description	Amount
6609	SSE	RLCC Electricity 2/6-18/7/23 credit in full	-£1,207.48
6610	SSE	RLCC Electricity 2/6-18/7/23 Revised	£614.07
6611	SSE	RLCC Elect. 19/7-1/8/23 Brings ac/t in line with actual	£197.57
Total Direct Credit			-£395.84

Date Prepared: 15/02/2024

## ORDERS FOR PAYMENT - BY BACS TRANSFER

Number	Supplier	Purchase Description	Amount
6612	Armour Arbor	Winter Tree Work MELNR	£2,400.00
6613	Arnold Laver	Timber & Posts RLCC Feb 24	£15.44
6614	Alan Hadley Ltd	6 Yard Skip CEM Feb 24	£288.00
6615	Bowak Ltd	Cleaning & Caretaking supplies SJP & MPCC Feb 24	£41.48
6616	Bowak Ltd	Cleaning & Caretaking supplies all sites Feb 24	£258.29
6617	Bracknell Pest Control	Pest Treatment Allotments Feb 24	£54.00
6618	Claire Connell	Audit Services for Year End 31 March 24	£880.00
6619	Creating Technical Solutions	Vehicle repairs Cam Belt YK60 UJJ Parks	£505.80
6620	Creating Technical Solutions	Vehicle repairs Cam Belt YK60 UTY Parks	£505.80
6621	GLS (Findel)	Disinfectant/Hand Towels Various sites	£68.26
6622	Grounds Management Association	Membership 24/25	£175.00
6623	IT QED Ltd	Azure Subscription Jan 24	£5.64
6624	John Gosden Consulting Ltd	MELNR Supervising Engineer visit Jan 24 - Annual State.	£800.00
6625	Meadowmania (MAS Seeds)	Wildflower Seed Mix Flowerbeds in Earley	£160.00
6626	Nationwide Bark & Play Surfaces LLP	Hardwood Chips Meadow Park Feb 24	£359.99
6627	Premier Office Supplies	Office Stationery Feb 24	£11.00
6628	Select Environmental Services	Waste collection RH Jan 24	£13.34
6629	Select Environmental Services	Waste collection general litter Jan 24	£579.75
6630	Select Environmental Services	Waste collection RLCC Jan 24	£61.16
6631	Select Environmental Services	Waste collection MPCC/MPSOC Jan 24	£202.28
6632	Select Environmental Services	Waste collection CP Jan 24	£40.43
6633	Southern Maintenance Solutions UK Ltd	SJP Hot water tank investigation Jan 24	£180.60
6634	Tradepoint UK B&Q	Cordless Drill + Painting bits for Bus Shelters Feb 24	£180.49
6635	Tradepoint UK B&Q	Fence Timber RLCC Feb 24	£56.80
6636	Tradepoint UK B&Q	Gloves & Easi Fill MPCC Feb 24	£33.77
6637	Tradepoint UK B&Q	Bird Seeds MELNR Feb 24	£34.20
6638	Tradepoint UK B&Q	Maintenance items various sites	£173.19
6639	Tradepoint UK - Screwfix	Door return Mechanism MPCC	£4.99
6640	Travis Perkins	Gravel Bulk Bags Allotments Feb 24	£235.24
6641	Wokingham Borough Council	Occupation charge for CP Feb 24	£293.50

**Total: £8,618.44**

Date Prepared: 26/02/2024

**IMPREST ACCOUNT - Reimbursement Vouchers 920 - 932**

Vouchers between 19th January 2024 - 26th February 2024

<b>Number</b>	<b>Details</b>	<b>Amount</b>
920	Grant - Link Visiting Scheme	£500.00
921	Grant - Wokingham Job Support	£300.00
922	Grant - Me 2 Club	£750.00
923	Damage Deposit Refund OE	£50.00
924	Salaries Jan 24	£33,508.26
925	HMRC PAYE & NI Jan 24	£11,701.48
926	LGPS Pensions Jan 24	£14,077.29
927	Prudential AVCs Jan 24	£200.00
928	Damage Deposit Refund BW	£50.00
929	Damage Deposit Refund SB	£50.00
930	Damage Deposit Refund TO	£100.00
931	Donation Link Visiting Scheme Afternoon Tea	£250.00
932	Damage Deposit Refund AA	£50.00
<b>Total Payments</b>		<b>£61,587.03</b>