

Aston Clinton Parish Council

Investment Strategy

1. Introduction

Aston Clinton Parish Council (ACPC) acknowledges the importance of prudently investing surplus funds held on behalf of the community.

This strategy complies with the revised requirements set out in the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister's Guidance on Local Government Investments and takes account of the Section 15(1) (a) of the Local Government Act 2003.

2. Investment Objectives

ACPC's investment objectives are:

- a) Security of its funds.
- b) Liquidity of its investments to meet council's needs.
- c) To optimize the return on its investments commensurate with a prudent view of risk to reward

All investments will be made in sterling, as a minimum surplus funds will be aggregated in an interest-bearing bank account..

Government guidance maintains that borrowing of monies purely to invest, or to lend and make a return, is unlawful and ACPC will not engage in such activity.

3. Specified Investments

Specified Investments are those offering high security and high liquidity, made in sterling and with a maturing of no more than a year.

ACPC will aim to achieve the optimum return on its investments commensurate with the proper level of security and liquidity.

For the prudent management of its treasury balances, maintaining sufficient levels of security and liquidity, ACPC will use:

- Deposits with banks, building societies, local authorities or other public authorities
- The Debt Management Agency of HM Government (Public Works Loans).

The choice of institution and length of deposit will be at the approval of Full Council.

4. Non-Specified Investments

These investments have greater potential risk – examples include investment in the money market, stocks and shares.

Given the unpredictability and uncertainty surrounding such investments ACPC will not use this type of investment.

5. External Borrowing Strategy

ACPC acknowledges the importance of borrowing funds and the financial impact on the council and the local community.

ACPC will agree borrowing for specific capital projects as defined in Section 16 of the Local Government Act 2003.

All borrowing must be approved by Full Council.

ACPC will ensure the following criteria when considering requesting borrowing approval:

- The borrowing should only be used for the purpose of capital expenditure as defined by Section 16 of the Local Government Act 2003.
- Any unallocated balances including, where appropriate capital receipts beyond those required for the prudent financial management of the council, should be used in the project for which the borrowing is required.
- The council should have a realistic budget for the servicing and repayment of the debt, taking into account the future effect on the council's precept and cash flow.
- The council must not mortgage or charge any of its properties as security for money borrowed.

ACPC will determine the period of each loan which should not exceed the period for which the expenditure is forecast to provide benefit to the council i.e. useful life of the asset.

6. Risk Assessments

There will be due regard to the Financial Services Compensation Scheme as this covers up to £85,000 with any one institution.

ACPC will aim to spread 'specified investments' over a range of different providers in such a way as to limit exposure and minimise risk.

The Responsible Financial Officer (RFO) in consultation with Full Council will determine the maximum periods for which funds may prudently be committed so as not to compromise liquidity.

ACCP will monitor the yield on investments by having regard to the general financial, economic and political environment nationally.

All resolutions relating to investments will be noted in the minutes.

7. Reporting on Investment Performance

Investment performance will be circulated quarterly to Full Council.

Investment forecasts for the next financial year will be accounted for when the budget is prepared.

At the end of the financial year, the RFO will report on investment activity to Full Council.

8. Review and Amendment of Regulations

ACPC's investment position will be reviewed regularly by the RFO and reported to Full Council for consideration.

The Council's investment strategy will be reviewed annually.

ACPC reserves the right to make variations to the strategy at any time subject to the approval of Full Council. Any variations will be minuted and made available to the public.

9. Freedom of Information

In accordance with the Freedom of Information Act 2000 this document will be available on the ACPC website www.astonclinton.org and in paper form from the ACPC office.

Agenda item FS23.18

To Appoint an Internal Auditor for 2023/2024

REPORT AUTHOR: MRS S PAYNE, PARISH CLERK/RFO

SUMMARY

To consider quotes for internal audit services for 2023/2024.

BACKGROUND

Auditing Solutions Ltd have informed Council that due to various personal circumstances, the Council's current internal auditor is having to relinquish some of his clients. As the company is experiencing difficulties in recruiting replacement staff, they are curtailing their workload and are therefore unable to continue to provide internal audit services to ACPC. They suggest that the Internal Audit Forum website be used to search for a parish and town council internal auditor.

Five internal auditors were contacted, via the Internal Audit Forum, to quote for the provision of internal services and four responded.

QUOTE 1

Background: I previously was self-employed as a bookkeeper (including payroll) and prior to that ran my own retail business in Aylesbury. On retiring I became a parish clerk serving for 8 years (with CiLCA), and for the last 2 years have been conducting AGAR internal audits. I am a member of the Internal Audit Forum and have just joined their subcommittee looking at how the audit process may be improved. In year 2022/23 I completed 11 audits. References can be provided.

Approach: Aston Clinton would be by far the largest council financially should I be appointed but my approach would be no different. My focus areas apart from ensuring the numbers add up are: * Good financial governance in place * Evidence the AGAR is owned by the whole council not just the responsibility of the Clerk/RFO * Financial Regulations that match and support the actual way you conduct business * A sound understanding of risk and how that is reviewed * Processes that comply or reflect best practice in the Practitioners Guide

Costs: To carry out one audit - £70. Any additional statement in regard to non-compliance or identified weaknesses (with suggested corrective action) - £30. I note you have an interim audit and have looked at the auditor's report online. I would not generally provide such a comprehensive report again only highlighting any weaknesses or issues identified so the same costs would apply for a 2nd audit as per the AGAR.

QUOTE 2

Background: I have been a Parish Clerk in Bucks (and Herts) for 8 years, I'm CiLCA qualified and a Principal Member of the SLCC, with a background in HR. I carry out several Internal Audits and am a member of the Internal Audit Forum. Living quite local to Aston Clinton I know the village fairly well.

Costs: I have capacity to carry out the internal audit for you. I think one audit would be sufficient, the fee would be £280.

QUOTE 3

Background: I am a CiLCA qualified Clerk but only trained as an IA at the beginning of this year. I have however, already completed 5 internal audit's this year, ranging in precept size from £22k to £675k, all of which have confirmed they would like to retain my services for next year.

Approach: I conduct remote audits which includes a thorough review of your website, looking at both statutory and non-statutory information, a Zoom call with yourself which is generally around an hour, my completed AIAR Form 3, and a written report of my findings.

Costs: my standard fee is £200

QUOTE 4

Background: I am relatively new to internal auditing (this will be my second year), I am an experienced Town and Parish Clerk and RFO, a parish councillor and currently work as an Assistant County Officer alongside supplying internal audit services to parish councils. I also hold AAT Level 3 and CiLCA qualifications.

Approach: I would complete much of the audit virtually, but would be happy to arrange to visit if this was required to check paper records.

Costs: my standard fee is £370

FINANCIAL & GOVERNANCE CONSIDERATIONS

Costs for internal audits will come from the Payroll & Audit Services budget code 4150. For comparison Council's recent internal audit fees have been £480 per internal audit visit (2 a year).

Section 2.6 of Council's Financial Regulations state:

2.6. The internal auditor shall:

- be competent and independent of the financial operations of the Council;
- report to Council in writing, or in person, on a regular basis with a minimum of one annual written report during each financial year;
- demonstrate competence, objectivity and independence, be free from any actual or perceived conflicts of interest, including those arising from family relationships; and
- have no involvement in the financial decision making, management or control of the Council.

LEGAL & OTHER IMPLICATIONS

None.

RECOMMENDATION

- a. To appoint an internal auditor for 2023/2024.

Agenda item FS23.19

To Note the Practitioners' Guide 2023 Change Regarding Email Management & Agree a Course of Action

REPORT AUTHOR: MRS S PAYNE, PARISH CLERK/RFO

SUMMARY

To consider the need to move to an email account linked to the Council's website following a change in the Joint Panel on Accountability & Governance (JPAG) Practitioner's Guide 2023.

BACKGROUND

Council's external auditor, PKF Littlejohn, have informed Council that the JPAG Practitioners' Guide 2023, which is mandatory for the 2023/2024 period, has a change within paragraph 1.26. This paragraph relates to the requirement in relation to Assertion 3 and states '*email management – every authority should have an email account that belongs to the council and to which the council has access – this ideally would be a .gov.uk or .org.uk address or could be an address linked to the council's website.* In order to answer yes to Assertion 3 in the 2023/2024 Annual Governance Statement the local authority should ensure that it has an email address that complies with this requirement and if it does not already is should do so urgently.

To meet this requirement council should investigate the setting up of email addresses for each councillor on the @astonclinton.org.uk account or take the opportunity to change the website domain name to a .gov.uk address.

NALC and SLCC are encouraging councils to move to a .gov.uk domain name and email addresses and NALC issued the following advice - [NALC's blog regarding the importance of a secure email system](#). The SLCC are also offering a webinar on the '[Benefits of Using a .gov.uk Domain & What's Involved](#)' on Wednesday 25th October at 3pm-4pm at a cost of £30 per person.

FINANCIAL & GOVERNANCE CONSIDERATIONS

Current domain name hosting fee is £252 per year from cost code 4195 (website).

Current .gov.uk domain name cost is £100 pa for the first 2 years then £50pa.

LEGAL & OTHER IMPLICATIONS

The current JPAG Practitioners' Guide state that:

- 5.205. All authorities except parish meetings must now have an official website. To comply with GDPR, councils should provide official email accounts for their councillors as well as for their clerk and other officers.
- 5.206. When choosing a domain name for the council's website and emails, many local council websites are appropriately making use of the [official GOV.UK](#) domain, with email addresses being linked to that domain.

- 5.207. Using a GOV.UK domain for your council website and email accounts demonstrates the council's official local government status. Members of the public are increasingly cyber security awareness, so a GOV.UK domain can also help to build trust, and credibility and visibly demonstrates authenticity. Many people will now reasonably expect a local council to have a GOV.UK domain name.
- 5.208. For the purposes of user management, councils should ensure that the proper officer can add and remove member and staff email accounts. Commercial 'dashboard' email and web systems offer centralised searching of all data contained within the system for effective compliance with GDPR Subject Access Requests and Freedom of Information Requests.
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RECOMMENDATION

- a. To agree a course of action for future email management.

Agenda item FS23.20

To Consider Funding Options for Additional Security Fencing at the All Weather Pitch

REPORT AUTHOR: SAMANTHA PAYNE, CLERK/RFO

SUMMARY

To consider options for funding the cost of installing additional security fencing at the AWP.

BACKGROUND

At the 12th July 2023 Facilities Committee meeting the quotes below, for the installation of additional security fencing to the AWP, were considered.

| | | |
|----------|---|---------|
| Quote A: | 180m rotating anti-climb guard (spikes) | £13,361 |
| Quote B: | 178m anti climb roller barrier & warning signage (every 5m) | £23,987 |

Income from the AWP over the past 3 years was noted at 2020/21: £462.80; 2021/22: £1031.38 & 2022/23: £1449.55

It was agreed at this meeting (minute F23.20v) that the installation of additional security fencing was viable given the risk to damage by unauthorised users but the issue of funding would need to be considered by the Finance and Staffing Committee.

FINANCIAL & GOVERNANCE CONSIDERATIONS

The expenditure would need to either come from General Reserves, which stand at £82,977 or could be accounted for in the 2024/2025 budget.

LEGAL & OTHER IMPLICATIONS

None.

RECOMMENDATION

- a. To agree how the expenditure will be financed.

Agenda item FS23.21

To Consider Quotes for the Provision of Office Broadband/Phone Services

REPORT AUTHOR: MRS S PAYNE, PARISH CLERK/RFO

SUMMARY

To consider quotes for the provision of broadband and phone services to the office.

BACKGROUND

Council is currently out of contract with its current broadband and phone services provider BT. Current out of contract costs are: £105 per month (£1260 per year). This is for 2 x cloud voice licences & handsets; Unlimited UK calls & Superfast SOGEA Broadband. Quotes were sought from BT and [National Business Communications](#) (NBC)

BT Quote

For same provision but with two upgraded handsets and new BT Smart Router

Costs: £93.95 per month = **£1127 per year.**

NBC Quote

For same as current provision

Cost: £69.93 per month with a £80 install charge = **£919.16 per year**

FINANCIAL & GOVERNANCE CONSIDERATIONS

Costs are from budget code 4140 (phone/broadband) with a budget of £1100 of which at 31st August 2023 £608 leaving £492.

LEGAL & OTHER IMPLICATIONS

None.

RECOMMENDATION

- a. To accept a quote and appoint a broadband/phone provider for the office.

Aston Clinton Parish Council

Equality & Diversity Policy

1. Introduction

- 1.1 Aston Clinton Parish Council is committed to promoting equality and diversity in all aspects of its work and believe that everyone, regardless of their background or characteristics, should be treated with respect and fairness.
- 1.2 This policy outlines the Council's commitment to creating an inclusive and diverse environment and sets out our approach to achieving equality for all. The policy aims to:
 - promote equality of opportunity for all members, employees and volunteers, as well as for the wider community;
 - prevent discrimination, harassment and victimisation;
 - encourage diversity and inclusion within the Parish Council; and
 - comply with legal obligations under the Equality Act 2010.
- 1.3 This policy applies to all members, employees, volunteers, contractors, and members of the public who engage with Aston Clinton Parish Council.

2. Background

- 2.1 The Equality Act 2010 legally protects people from discrimination in the workplace and in wider society and replaces the existing anti-discrimination laws with a single Act. It simplifies the law, removing inconsistencies and making it easier for people to understand and comply with.
- 2.2 The characteristics that are protected by the Act (Equality Act 2010 S4) are:
 - Disability
 - Age
 - Gender reassignment
 - Marriage and civil partnership
 - Pregnancy and maternity
 - Race
 - Religion or belief (this includes lack of belief)
 - Sex
 - Sexual orientation
- 2.3 The public sector Equality Duty Act (Equality Act 2010 s.149) means that public bodies have to consider all individuals when carrying out their day-to-day work – in shaping policy, in delivering services and in relation to their own employees. It requires that public bodies have due regard to the need to:
 - eliminate discrimination;
 - advance equality of opportunity; and
 - foster good relations between different people when carrying out their activities.

3. Types of Unlawful Discrimination

- 3.1 Direct discrimination is where a person is treated less favourably than another because of a protected characteristic. In limited circumstances, employers can directly discriminate against an individual for a reason related to any of the protected characteristics where there is an occupational requirement. The

occupational requirement must be crucial to the post and a proportionate means of achieving a legitimate aim.

- 3.2 Indirect discrimination is where a provision, criterion or practice is applied that is discriminatory in relation to individuals who have a relevant protected characteristic such that it would be to the detriment of people who share that protected characteristic compared with people who do not, and it cannot be shown to be a proportionate means of achieving a legitimate aim.
- 3.3 Harassment is where there is unwanted conduct, related to one of the protected characteristics that has the purpose or effect of violating a person's dignity; or creating an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive environment. It does not matter whether or not this effect was intended by the person responsible for the conduct.
- 3.4 Associative discrimination is where an individual is directly discriminated against or harassed for association with another individual who has a protected characteristic.
- 3.5 Perceptive discrimination is where an individual is directly discriminated against or harassed based on a perception that they have a particular protected characteristic when they do not, in fact, have that protected characteristic.
- 3.6 Victimisation occurs where an employee is subjected to a detriment because they made or supported a complaint or raised a grievance under the Equality Act 2010, or because they are suspected of doing so.

4. Equality & Diversity Principles

Aston Clinton Parish Council is committed to:

- 4.1 Eliminating Discrimination
The Council will not discriminate on the basis of age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex, or sexual orientation in any of our activities or decision-making processes.
- 4.2 Promoting Inclusion
The Council will actively promote an inclusive culture that values diversity and ensures that all individuals feel respected, valued and able to contribute to their fullest potential.
- 4.3 Equality of Opportunity
The Council will provide equal opportunities for all individuals, recognizing the benefits that diversity can bring to our community and organisation.
- 4.4 Reasonable Adjustments
The Council will make reasonable adjustments to remove barriers and provide equal access to services, facilities and information for people with disabilities.
- 4.5 Prevention of Harassment
The Council will not tolerate any form of harassment, bullying, or victimisation. All complaints will be taken seriously and dealt with promptly and confidentially.
- 4.6 Positive Action
The Council will take positive action measures to address underrepresentation or disadvantage faced by specific groups where it is appropriate and lawful to do so.

5. Equal Opportunities in Employment

- 5.1 The Council will avoid unlawful discrimination in all aspects of employment including recruitment, promotion, opportunities for training, pay and benefits, discipline and selection for redundancy.
- 5.2 Persons and job specifications will be limited to those requirements that are necessary for the effective performance of the job. Candidates for employment or promotion will be assessed objectively against the requirements for the job, taking account of any reasonable adjustments that may be required for candidates with a disability. Disability and personal or home commitments will not form the basis of employment decisions except where necessary.
- 5.3 The Council will consider any possible indirectly discriminatory effect of its standard working practises, including the number of hours to be worked, the times at which these are to be worked and the place at which work is to be done, when considering requests for variations to these standards working practise.

6. Responsibilities

- 6.1 All members and employees of Aston Clinton Parish Council are responsible for adhering to this policy, treating others with respect, and promoting equality and diversity.
- 6.2 Every employee is required to assist the Council to meet its commitments to provide equal opportunities in employment and avoid unlawful discrimination. Employees can be held personally liable as well as, or instead of, the Council for any act of unlawful discrimination. Employees who commit serious acts of harassment may be guilty of a criminal offence.

7. Implementation

- 7.1 Aston Clinton Parish Council will provide training and awareness programs on equality and diversity for members, employees and volunteers.
- 7.2 Council will monitor and review this policy annually to ensure its effectiveness.
- 7.3 Council will investigate and address any breaches of this policy promptly and fairly.

8. Reporting & Complaints

- 8.1 Any member, employee, or member of the public who believes they have been subjected to discrimination, harassment, or victimisation should report it in accordance with the Council's grievance and complaint procedures.