

Colwich Parish Council

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Dear Residents

Over recent months, since the announcement of the Parish Council's budget at the Annual Parish Assembly on 10th March 2025, there have been a number of Facebook posts and Freedom of Information requests. It is perfectly right and proper that local taxpayers hold the Council to account. However, it is not acceptable when this becomes vexatious and libelous.

AUDIT

Colwich Parish Council undergoes an internal audit every year by an audit firm based in the southeast of Staffordshire. This firm is unconnected to the Council, its Councillors or Officials. The internal auditors visit the Parish Office twice each year to undertake an audit of the Council's files, including financial records, minutes of meetings and the Council's policies and procedures. A recent report from the auditor included the comment:

"It is our opinion that the quality of governance and reporting demonstrated by your council is one of the leaders in the Staffordshire area and you are to be commended on your efforts."

Colwich Parish Council also undergoes an Annual Governance and Accountability Return as a form of external audit. This "external audit" is undertaken by an international audit firm appointed by Smaller Authorities' Audit Appointment Ltd (SAAA). The external auditor for Staffordshire parish councils is Forvis Mazars Ltd.

BUDGET

Colwich Parish Council must avoid setting a budget which might breach the Local Audit and Accountability Act 2014. In recent years the Council has taken the decision to use some of its Reserves as part of its overall budget thereby reducing the amount requested under the precept (the parish council's charge to the Borough Council which forms part of the Council Tax issued to Colwich residents).

The tables below detail the spreadsheet used by the Finance Committee to make a budget and thereby a precept recommendation to the Full Council. The top line indicates the gross budget allocated to the various spending committees Environment, Communications, Events, Youth Council, Leisure and Employment. The Resources heading is funds controlled directly by the Chief Officer which includes electricity, water, parish maintenance, election expenses, MS365 costs etc.

The Finance Committee recommended offsetting some of the proposed budget through income such bank interest. The Committee also recommended that funds be taken from Council Reserves to reduce the amount charged to the precept. In 2025/26 the Committee recommended that £32,000 be reallocated from the Council's Reserves whilst the 2024/25 budget recommended using £56,000.

	Budget 2025-26							
	Resources	Enviro	Comms	Events	Yth	Leisure	Employ	Total
Total Budget	41,633	3,775	2,900	16,500	0	0	225,567	290,375
Income	-6,798							
Roads Reserve	-10,000							
Sustain Reserve	-4,000							
Leisure Reserve	-18,000							
Totals	2,835	3,775	2,900	16,500	0	0	225,567	251,577

The £251,577 is further reduced by a Central Government Grant of £10,410.98 giving a precept request of £241,166.25. This amount is divided by the Tax Base, the number of Band D equivalent properties in the parish. In 2025/26 this figure was 1,890.59. The Band D charge is therefore £127.56.

	Budget 2024-25							
	Resources	Enviro	Comms	Events	Yth	Leisure	Employ	Total
Total Budget	51,490	3,775	2,900	17,500	0	371,500	209,769	656,934
Income	-5,000	-1,600				-371,500		
Reserves	-6,000					-50,000		
Totals	40,490	2,175	2,900	17,500	0	-50,000	209,769	222,834

The Council included a figure for the expected s106 funds (see below for explanation) to improve the JPF. As can be seen this amount was added and then taken out through expected income thus having no impact on the overall precept figure.

Again, the £222,834 was reduced by the Central Government Grant of £7,984.02 giving a precept charge of £214,849.87. The Tax Base for 2024/25 was 1,922.40. The Band D charge was, therefore, £111.76

Due to the s106 item in the 2024/25 budget the Council published the proposed budget breakdown after reductions. As no such allocation is included in 2025/26 then the Council published the gross budget, before use of Reserves.

For those struggling to understand the 2024/25 figures, these are reposted below without the notional s106 allocation:

	Resources	Enviro	Comms	Events	Yth	Leisure	Employ	Total
Total Budget	51,490	3,775	2,900	17,500	0	0	209,769	285,434
Less Income	-5,000	-1,600				0		
						-		
Reserves	-6,000					50,000		
						-		
Totals	40,490	2,175	2,900	17,500	0	50,000	209,769	222,834

There was no discrepancy in the 2024/25 budget and there is no discrepancy in the 2025/26 budget.

The overall expenditure by the Council in 2024/25 is available on the Council's website within the Council Information/Accounts/Accounts 2024/25 file:

[Summary Income and Expenditure by Budget Heading 31_03_2025 cost centre.PDF](#)

The total Budget for 2024/25, excluding s106 monies, was £285,434. The actual expenditure in 2024/25 was £286,276, a difference of £842 or 0.29%.

The Town and Country Planning Act 1990 includes, at section 106 (s106), the ability for the Planning Authority to enter into a legally binding agreement, also known as a planning obligation, with a developer. The s106 agreement ensures that developers contribute to infrastructure and community benefits to mitigate the impact of their development. These agreements are used to secure contributions for things like affordable housing, public open space, and infrastructure improvements. The purpose of the s106 agreement is to make developments acceptable in planning terms by addressing the negative impacts they might have on the local community and infrastructure. Stafford Borough Council has entered into s106 agreements with the developers of Green Close, Devereux Gardens, Lovell estate on Little Tixall Lane; back of the Clifford Arms, Millers Croft, Hillview Grove and Hathorn Grove. It was s106 monies that were used by the Borough Council to refurbish the play area on the St Mary's estate and by Staffordshire County Council to install the speed cushion near Roseacre.

STAFFING

Comments have been made about the staffing budget with comparisons made to two other Councils in Stafford. All Councils, whether that be County, Borough or Parish operate different from other Councils of the same level. At the Parish, Town or City Council level some employ Lengthsmen. Some organize their own summer fete and Christmas Lights switch-on. Some run community centers. A table of the Powers and Duties of a parish council may be found on our website:

Council Information/Powers and Duties of the Parish Council

[POWERS AND DUTIES OF COLWICH PARISH COUNCIL.pdf](#)

Similar population sized Councils, with their Budgets and Staffing Costs, demonstrating that one-size does not fit all might include:

Council	Budget*	Staffing
Armitage and Handsacre	£171,162	£44,420
Brewood & Coven	£243,351	£153,946
Featherstone & Brinsford	£97,911	£34,063
Cheslyn Hay	£339,409	£204,694
Huntington	£132,823	£66,005
Bickenhill & Marston	£282,337	£145,969
East Preston	345,433	112,189
Cheddar	378,627	184,501
Welton-by-Lincoln	214,158	129,300 (not including NI)
Calstock	339,300	163,600
Ditton	287,441**	359,826

Broadcyst	430,685 (precept)	218,118.43
Werrington	182,742	43,651***
Whetstone	295,470	160,638
Botley & North Hinksey	160,236	62,768
Adlington TC	26,172	7,775

*Historic budgets not necessarily for 2025/26.

**Ditton also receives £565,755 income from a community centre etc.

***Engage a Warden, Sports ground maintenance and Heigh Road Maintenance at a cost of £40,132. Adding NI and Pension to this adds a further ~£15,000 giving an equivalent total of ~£99,000 salaries.

You will be aware that as of April 2025 the Government increased the Employers National Insurance Contribution. This was a twofold increase including a reduction in the NI free allowance from £9,100 to £5,000 as well as an increase in the payment from 13.8% to 15%. Unlike many other parish councils, in setting the 2025/26 budget the Council increased its NI allocation by 40% to allow for these changes. The actual increase came in at 37%.

Staffordshire County Council used to cut the grass verges through the village once in every three weeks. The Parish Council took on this work and used different contractors for a number of years before taking the decision, in 2016, to bring this in-house by employing 2 part-time Lengthsmen. The Council, as a responsible employer, took the decision in 2023 to employ additional part-time Lengthsmen to learn from their more experienced colleagues so as to retain knowledge within the Council and plan for the future.

These additional Lengthsmen also allowed the Council to undertake further tasks across the parish. Additional work undertaken recently includes the clearing of Coley Lane over the winter, the recent gully cleaning along Main Road, laying out and maintenance of the evolving Remembrance field off Coley Lane, preparing for and stewarding the summer fete and Christmas lights switch-on. Whilst the weekday Lengthsman has progressed, the weekend Lengthsman chose not to remain with the Council. Rather than employ a replacement the Council distributed the work amongst the remaining three Lengthsmen not least the opening/closing of the gates and the cleaning of the toilets on a Saturday and Sunday morning.

It is worth noting that pre-Covid the County Council decided that it could no longer cut verges once in every three weeks. Instead, it cuts verges only twice per year. Those areas without Lengthsmen rely on the goodwill of residents to cut the verge outside their property with other areas, not backing onto a dwelling, being unmanaged. Some examples from around the Borough include:





Equally, the Council decided to plan for the future, within the Parish Office by employing a junior administration officer. This position was to enable the Council to begin an on-going process of training its future senior officials with knowledge being retained within the Council. This official will be trained both in the workings of Colwich Parish Council but also be expected to undertake national Local Council qualifications such as the Introduction to Local Council Administration (ILCA), Financial Introduction to Local Council Administration (FILCA), Principles of Internal Auditing Local Councils (PIALC) and the Certificate in Local Council Administration (CiLCA). The training and national Local Council qualifications will ensure a smooth handover, when current senior staff leave the Council in contrast to previous recruitment.

The Parish Council resurrected the summer fete following requests from residents. This was initially organized by Councillors in their spare time with additional support from officials. The Council took the decision that it is better for this work to be managed by officials, not least so that knowledge is retained within the Council. The Council, therefore, decided that it will, in due course, amend its office structure, creating the position of Events Officer to organize the summer fete and Christmas lights switch-on as well as to manage the Council's website and social media posts and to act as the Council's Data Protection Officer.

The Council had not employed a cleaner for the Parish Office for a number of years, following the retirement of the previous contractor. In 2024, the Council decided to employ a part-time cleaner.

With the appointment of the additional four, now three, part-time officials, the overall staffing budget increased. The Council has used its reserves to cover a percentage of this increase, see the budget details above. However, the use of Reserves does not cover all of the increase and cannot be used going forward. Consequently, the balance has to be charged to the precept.

All Parish Council staff are employed under the National Joint Council for Local Government Services (NJC) terms and conditions using the National Agreement on Pay and Conditions of Service (Green Book). The NJC consists of representatives from the Local Government Association and the main local government Trade Unions, e.g. Unison, GMB and Unite the Union, who represent members in the Metropolitan; County and District/Borough Councils. The parish council trade union (Association of Local Council Clerks) does not have a seat at this table and parish council officials do not get a vote on the pay offer. However, as parish council officials are employed under Green Book terms then they automatically receive the final agreed pay award with back pay to April. The overall spine points for parish council officials are the same as those for Borough Council and County Council officials although the pay bands, using these spine points, differ between the County, Borough and Parish Councils.

PAY BANDS

To assist Parish Councils in assessing and paying their Clerks the appropriate amount for their role, the National Association of Local Councils (NALC), representing parish councils, and the Society of Local Council Clerks (SLCC), representing officials, issued a joint template for assessing the salary for Clerks. This assessment looks at 8 Aspects with each one having four levels corresponding to the main pay bands. These main pay bands are then further divided into 3 sub-divisions (below substantive, substantive and above substantive).

In using the template, the Council assesses the role of its Clerk (NOT the person) against these Aspects and decides which LC level is appropriate. A final matrix is then produced which indicates which pay band LC1, LC2, LC3 or LC4 and which sub-division is appropriate for their Clerk.

For instance, parish councils of about 5,000 residents will score LC3 in Aspect 1. However, Council A might only meet monthly and have no formal timetable for Committees and so would be LC2 under Aspect 3. In contrast, Council B might have a formal timetable for 10 Committees as well as monthly Full Council meetings and so would be LC4 under Aspect 3.

The Council periodically reassess its officials using this template to ensure that it is reimbursing them appropriately for the role being undertaken. In recent years an assessment was undertaken in 2016/17 and 2023/24. The 2023/24 assessment covered all officials working for the Council. For non-Clerk officials, comparisons were made with similar roles undertaken elsewhere in local government.

As these assessments can identify personal information about officials they are exempt from disclosure (see below).

Aspect 1 - Knowledge

This aspect is based on the size of the Council.

LC1 Small parishes: Salt & Enson (333); Sandon & Burston (361); Ingestre (194) or Tixall (241).

LC2 Medium parishes: Hixon (1,917); Denstone (1,220) or Brocton (1,082).

LC3 Large Parish Councils/Small Town Councils: Huntington (4,536); Eccleshall (4,651); Gnosall (4,736) and Armitage & Handsacre (5,335).

LC4 Large Town or City Councils: Lichfield (32,219); Leek (20,768); Biddulph (19,892) or Stone (16,385).

Aspect 2 - Mental Skills

The job requires judgmental or creative skills:

LC1 to solve straightforward problems

LC2 to solve straightforward problems

LC3 to solve varied problems or develop solutions or plans over the short term.

LC4 to analyse information or situations and to solve difficult problems or develop solutions or plans over the medium term.

Aspect 3- Interpersonal/Communications

This is based on the number of meetings held each year.

LC1 Up to 6 meetings per year (the minimum is the Annual Meeting plus 3 other Full Council meetings).

LC2 A Council having 6-12 meetings.

LC3 A Council meeting monthly and having 2 Committee.

LC4 A Council meeting every month as well as having numerous Committees.

Aspect 4 - Initiative and Independence.

LC1 Access to guidance on unusual or difficult problems.

LC2 Access to guidance on serious problems.

LC3 Consults a supervisor/manager for advice on policy or resource issues.

LC4 Making frequent decisions and exercising initiative without ready access to others.

Aspect 5 - Responsibility for People

LC1 Some direct impact on the wellbeing of individuals or groups of people.

LC2 Considerable direct impact... Many statutory functions.

LC3 High direct impact... Most statutory functions.

LC4 Major direct impact... Most statutory functions in a large town.

Aspect 6 - Responsibility for Employees

LC1 No Staff

LC2 Allocation of work to a small team, up to 10 staff.

LC3 High direct responsibility for the supervision, management, direction and training of employees. Co-ordinating the work of a group of up to 20 staff covering more than one area of activity or in more than one workplace.

LC4 Major direct responsibility for the management, direction, coordination and development of a number of employees, for instance over 20 staff, in different areas of activity of geographical workplaces.

Aspect 7 - Responsibility for Financial Resources.

LC1 Typical budget up to £25,000

LC2 Considerable direct responsibility for financial resources within a typical budget £25,000 - £250,000.

LC3 High direct responsibility for financial resources. May include contributing to setting and monitoring relevant typical budget of £250,000 - £750,000.

LC4 Major direct responsibility for financial resources, contributing to the setting and monitoring of relevant budgets in excess of £750,000.

Aspect 8 - Responsibility for Physical Resources

LC1 some direct responsibility for physical resources. The work regularly involves either: Some responsibility for security of buildings, external locations or equivalent Or: Day-to-day maintenance of equipment or premises: Or: Ordering, or stock control of, a limited range of supplies.

LC2 considerable direct responsibility for physical resources. The work involves either: Cleaning, maintenance and repair of a range of equipment, buildings, external locations or equivalent or: Security of buildings, external locations or equivalent or: Ordering, or stock control of, a range of equipment and supplies

LC3 High direct responsibility for physical resources. The work involves either: Adaptation, development or design of a wide range of equipment, land, buildings, other construction works or equivalent, or: Security of a range of high value physical resources or: Ordering of a wide range of equipment and supplies

LC4 major direct responsibility for physical resources. The work involves either: Security of a wide and very high value range of physical resources or: Ordering of a wide and high value range of equipment and supplies.

CLERK OR CHIEF OFFICER

The Clerk and Councils Direct note on their website that:

“The Clerk is the council’s Chief Executive and works for the Council as a corporate body. He or she has the prime responsibility for the administration of the Council, for managing any other staff and for carrying out the Council’s decisions. The Clerk is not simply a clerical or secretarial office whose role is merely to produce agendas and minutes (important though these tasks are). By analogy with the chief executive of a principal Council, the Clerk also has the responsibility of advising the Council before it takes a decision and warning it against proceeding with a course of actions which is unlawful. The Clerk is legally defined as an “office holder” and is an employee of the Council (often the only employee) and, as such, covered by the extensive legislation relating to employment rights and employment protection. They are also almost invariably designated the “proper officer” of the Council and thus has certain statutory duties to perform when the relevant legislation so provides (e.g. to sign the summons to Councillors to attend Council meetings).”

The Councillor/Clerk Relationship

Arnold-Baker on Local Council Administration section 9.16 states:

“The title “clerk” for a local council’s chief executive officer is honourable, familiar and short”.

The Clerk, or whatever term the Council chooses to call its senior member of staff, is the Proper Officer to the Council for any purpose in respect of which a proper officer is mentioned in any statute. In financial matters the senior officer is called the Responsible Financial Officer. The change of title between Clerk, Chief Officer, Chief Executive Officer etc. does not result in additional pay. Rather, the latter terms are used to clarify that the senior officer is not merely someone who takes notes at the Council meetings. A similar situation occurred in the Magistrates’ Court when the term Clerk was replaced by Legal Advisor to better reflect the work undertaken in advising the lay Magistrates.

Moving away from Clerk to Chief Officer or Chief Executive Officer is not unique to Colwich. A quick google search reveals:

Biddulph Town Council, with a total income in 2024/25 of £695,816, employs a Chief Officer.

Shavington-cum-Gresty PC in Cheshire, with a total spend in 2023/24 of £219,073, advertised for a Chief Officer in October 2024.

Hawkhurst PC in Kent, with a 2025/26 Budget of £300,850, note on their website *“The role of the Clerk is to act as the Chief Executive”*.

Hockliffe PC in Bedfordshire, with total receipts in 2023/24 of £45,013 note on their website: *“In effect, the Parish Clerk’s role is equivalent to that of Chief Executive”*.

Kidderminster Town Council, with total receipts in 2023/24 of £3,033,590, advertised for a *“Chief Executive [to be] the Proper Officer to the Council, in accordance with the Local Government and Housing Act 1989 and Proper Officer under the Local Government Act 1972.”*

Chesham Town Council in Buckinghamshire, with total receipts in 2024/25 of £4,113,195, recently advertised for a *“Chief Executive Officer and Town Clerk”*.

Irrespective of the size of the Parish, Town or City Council, the statutory role of the Clerk, Chief Officer or Chief Executive Officer remains the same. The powers available to the Chief Executive at Chesham are the same as those vested in the Chief Executive of Hockliffe.

STAFF SALARY

The Council has been asked to release details of staff salaries, especially in bands of £5,000 for those earning over £50,000 or above. As a data controller of personal information, the Council must decline. Under Section 17 of the Freedom of Information Act, the Council can neither confirm nor deny whether the salary of any official meets the criteria mentioned in such requests as such information is exempt under Section 40(2), personal data, of the Freedom of Information Act. Moreover, the right to a personal life and the right to have personal data remain private is enshrined in the Human Rights Act 1998 and the Data Protection Act 2018.

The Information Commissions Office has considered and ruled on this matter on numerous occasions and not least in its judgement of 25th May 2023 in the case of Broseley Town Council (ref: IC-210797-C4R5):

“17. However, the Commissioner also recognises the request is seeking the personal data of past and present employees in a very small public authority, and that it will not be possible to disclose the information in an anonymized way... The Council has argued that, in the circumstances of this case, the disclosure of this information would reveal significant detail about the individuals’ financial and employment circumstances. The Commissioner notes that he has considered a similar situation in Decision Notice IC-129568-H6F5, in which he decided that the requested information (the salary of a Parish Clerk) was exempt under section 40(2).

18. The Commissioner is also aware that the Council has directed the complainant to where related information (outgoing staff salaries by month, and other payments over £500) is made available for public inspection on the Council’s website. The Commissioner considers that the publishing of such information addresses the legitimate interest being pursued by the requester.

*19. The Commissioner has determined that there is insufficient legitimate interest to outweigh the fundamental rights and freedoms of the individuals. Therefore, he considers that there is no legal basis for the Council to disclose the requested information and to do so would be in breach of principle (a)***

20. The Commissioner’s decision is that the Council is entitled to rely on section 40(2) of FOIA to refuse to provide the requested information.”

**** General Data Protection Regulations - personal data shall be processed lawfully, fairly and in a transparent manner in relation to the data subject.**

IN CONCLUSION

Colwich Parish Council undergoes independent internal and external audits of its accounts, policies and procedures. These audits have shown NO evidence of corruption within the Council.

Colwich Parish Council sets a budget that meets the requirements of the Local Audit and Accountability Act 2014.

Colwich Parish Council can account for its income and expenditure without arithmetical error.

Colwich Parish Council employs only those officials deemed necessary to undertake the programme of works agreed by the Council in line with the Local Government Act 1972 s112.

Colwich Parish Council officials are paid in line with Green Book principles with their pay bands determined by using a nationally agreed template.

Colwich Parish Council, along with many other Councils, decided to change the job title of its senior official to better reflect the role undertaken.

Colwich Parish Council will rely on the exemptions of section 17 [neither confirm nor deny] and section 40(2) [personal data] of the Freedom of Information Act and will not release details of individual staff salaries, either explicitly or implicitly, as this would breach the Data Protection Act.

Colwich Parish Council welcomes residents holding it to account, but such actions must be reasonable and not be vexatious or libelous.

Revd. Mr. Michael Lennon FSLCC
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Colwich Parish Council

Cllr Wendy Plant
Chairman
Colwich Parish Council

