

THE CHARLTONS PARISH COUNCIL

NOTES ON PRECEPT 2024/2025

1. Clerk's Salary

Pay scales are based on the local government pay scales negotiated by the National Joint Council (NJC) for Local Government Services. 'Subject to satisfactory performance, you will progress automatically through the salary scale by annual increments until you reach the maximum of the scale.' The current contracted Clerk's hours are 26 hours a month and the National Association of Local Council Clerks (NALC) rate for my current grade 27 is £18.58 an hour. In accordance with NALC, 'the Council may withhold an increment if it is considered that performance fell below the level expected, following an annual review, or award an additional increment for exemplary performance if it chooses to do so.' To progress to scale 28 would give an increase of £0.47p per hour to £19.05. To progress to scale 29 would give an increase of £0.90p per hour to £19.41. In line with last year's progression, I have based the Clerk's salary on £19.41 x 26 (hours month) = £6,055.92 p.a. for consideration by the Personnel Committee.

2. Clerk's Expenses

The mileage rate has been budgeted at **45p per mile** in line with SLCC and NALC Car Allowance for Local Council Clerks. In line with common practice, the Clerk will continue to receive £10 monthly Work from Home Allowance.

3. Community Resilience Fund (CRF)

Following advice from our County Councillors and due to the likelihood of Somerset Council (SC) issuing a Section 114 notice, I propose that the Parish Council increases the 23/24 precept by approx. 18% in order to earmark £6,000 in a CRF for FY 24/25. This fund would only be used if all parish and town councils were asked to contribute towards providing services, such as additional highways costs and clearing gulleys/verges, on a fair and equal basis pro rata to their tax base. There are a number of 'reserves' held, which could be merged into one CRF, including gritting materials, additional grass cutting, ROW repairs, dog waste/grit bins, which would bring the total CRF to **£8,600**. To achieve this the PC would need to increase its precept by a minimum of £4,330 (18.04%) from £24,000 to £28,330 for FY 24/25. This would equate to an increase of approx. £10.45 per household per annum, the equivalent of 19.09% for a Band D property.

If councillors would like to hold a higher CRF, there is the option to increase the precept by £6,000 to £30,000, an increase of 25% on last year's precept and a 26.11% increase on a Band D precept equivalent of an additional £14.29 per year. This would provide £7,300 in the CRF plus the reserves already identified that could be merged to provide a total CRF of **£10,300**.

4. Other Parochial Activities

Speed Mitigation – Lytes Cary. Following the successful application for a Small Highway Improvement Scheme and purchase of a Speed Indicator Device with Solar Panel etc., the Speed Mitigation Reserve balance stands at £3,838.10, which has been earmarked for the speed mitigation scheme in Lytes Cary.

Speed Indicator Device. There is £555 in the reserve for future maintenance. CIL funds from the Fox and Hounds Development could also be used to make up any deficit if required.

Additional Grass Cutting/Hedge Maintenance. There is £788 in the reserve. I have included £210 in the precept to round the total up to £1,000. I proposed that this reserve is merged with the CRF fund as a highways expenditure.

Village Gateways Broadway reserve currently stands at £1,200 to cover the anticipated costs.

The Signage/Defibrillator reserve currently stands at £447 for the purchase of replacement batteries/pads and any repairs to or additional signage as requested. I have not included any additional funding as CIL funds due can be used towards defibrillator consumables and £283 is due back in VAT. Any expenditure for additional signage would fall under the Community Resilience Fund.

Village Car Park. I have left the reserve at £2,000 for the urgent drainage work/repairs to the village car park as CIL can be used to pay the additional cost.

Dog Waste/Grit Bins. £500 was held in reserve for the purchase of an additional dog bin at West Charlton and we have just purchased a new grit bin for £138 (incl. VAT) for opposite the Old Post Office which leaves the reserve at £362. I have included £140 to round the total back to £500.

Gritting materials The PC currently holds £200 in gritting materials. I have included an additional £200 to bring the total to £400 as gritting materials will most likely not be provided by SC next year. I propose this reserve is merged with the CRF.

Mill Pond Dredging reserve stands at £1,030. Work to the Mill Pond was last carried out in November 2020 and the bi-annual dredging is now overdue. The reserve is sufficient to fund the work and I will hasten Mr Attwell.

Christmas Trees. I have maintained the PC contribution towards the Charlton Adam/Mackrell Christmas Trees at £200. The reserve currently stands at £990 and we are about to pay the invoice for £330 (incl.VAT). This will bring the reserve total to £860 (+VAT refund.) Community fundraising is also anticipated.

Parish Council Website/Laptop. Currently stands at £204 with renewal of Microsoft Office (MO) due at approx. £50. I have included £150 to cover the hosting and domain renewals for the PC website and MO.

The War Memorial/Fingerpost Reserve Fund. I have included £500 in anticipation of funds required for grounds maintenance at the War Memorial, for which we are awaiting quotes. This will bring the reserve to £2,500.

Flood Mitigation Reserve Fund. I have left the reserve at £3,150 until costs are known, or a scheme is implemented through development.

Training. I have included £300 for clerk/councillor training.

Rights of Way (RoW). I have included £100 for the RoW Reserve, bringing the total to £700, for any materials required to repair footpaths/footbridges and gates. This could also be merged with the CRF?

Charltons Village News (CVN). I have included £315 for the annual contribution towards the PC's insert in the CVN.

5. Welham Field

The PC is currently receiving £500 pa in rent, which is now due for review. I propose an increase to £550 pa for approval. I have also included £500 to bring the reserve up to £3,000 to cover the anticipated Land Agent fees and legal advice plus any maintenance.

6. Grants and Charitable Donations

The Charltons Memorial Community Trust (CMCT) - Following the recent grant of £1,000 paid in October 2023 towards the CMCT improvements program, there is £125 left in the CMCT grant reserve. Due to the current financial situation with Somerset Council (SC) and the recommendation to hold at least 25% of precept in a Community Resilience Fund,

the PC can no longer maintain such a high level of grant to the CMCT as in previous years.

However, the PC understands that the PC needs to support CMCT projects in order for other granting bodies to release funds. Therefore, I propose the PC holds a reserve in 2024/25 of £3,000 to which the CMCT can apply as required and can be used towards grounds maintenance and/or the CMCT improvements program. This would be made up of £2,500 in the precept, PlayDay Reserve of £250 not applied for in this FY and £125 in place of a grant towards PlayDay next FY, which would be added to £125 remaining in reserve.

The Charltons Youth Club – Increased from £1,500 to £1,575.

Section 137 Grants - I have maintained the section 137 grants at £250 (expenditure which the PC believes is in the interests of, and will bring direct benefit to, their area or any part of it or all or some of its inhabitants).

Somerton Town Library – Due to the lack of grants available from SC next FY, I propose that the PC considers increasing the grant towards the running of the Somerton Town Library from £200 to £300.

Citizens Advice Bureau South Somerset – The PC last provided a grant to CAB South Somerset in March 2020 of £125. Again, due to the lack of grant funding from SC towards such invaluable services, I propose that the PC considers a grant of £200.

Royal British Legion Poppy Appeal/Wreath - £250 to purchase the PC wreath an additional Tommy figure and approx. 10 Tommy lamp post signs.

The Reading Room routine maintenance grant – maintained at £300 to cover the cost of hosting the defibrillator and Christmas lights.

7. Precept and General Reserve (GR)

The Joint Panel on Accountability and Governance Practitioners Guide (JPAG) (March 2020 edition) advises: “The generally accepted recommendation with regard to the appropriate minimum level of a Smaller Authority’s GR is that this should be maintained at between three (3) and twelve (12) months Net Revenue Expenditure (NRE).”

“The smaller the authority, the closer the figure should be to 12 months NRE.”

The estimated GR at 31/03/24 is £12,947 which is at a more acceptable level of 6 months NRE. I recommend that the PC continues to build this up and the PC should be able to hold 9 mos NRE next FY.

Therefore, in order to provide a CRF and to provide a more acceptable level of GR at 9 months NRE, the PC would need to increase its precept by a minimum of £4,330 (18.04%) from £24,000 to £28,330 for FY 24/25 (an increase of approx. £10.45 per household per annum, the equivalent of 19.09% for a Band D property) and a maximum of £6,000 (25%) from £24,000 to £30,000 (an increase of approx. £14.29 per household per annum, the equivalent of 26.11% for a Band D property).

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Becky Carter
Parish Clerk and Responsible Financial Officer

8th January 2024