

Proposed Changes to Parish Council Administrative Systems

1. Move to DALC Internal Audit Service

The current internal audit service is provided by a local firm of accountants. Their support and advice, and help in preparation of the year end accounts has been very valuable. However Internal Audit for Local Government should really be concentrating on the correct implementation of appropriate policies and procedures.

It is proposed that for the Year ending 31st March 2025, onwards that the Parish Council switch to using the DALC Internal Audit Service. This will be a small cost saving on the current service provider.

2. DALC Membership – Move to Enhanced Membership option

GLPC currently pays £280 per year for the standard membership. This is good value and we rely heavily on the organisation for advice. DALC provide a range of courses, most of which are now delivered by “Zoom”. Individual courses cost £50+ per course.

It is proposed that GLPC switch to DALCs “Enhanced Membership” option, at an additional cost of £200 per year. This means that the vast majority of training needed by Councillors and the Clerk will be obtained for no additional cost.

3. Switch to an online Finance System that has been created specifically for the use of Parish Councils

For the last few years GLPC has been using the “Kashflow” online finance system at a cost of £120 year.

The proposal is to switch to using “Scribe Accounts”. This system appears to be well used and liked by small councils and there is a good chance that any future Clerks will already be familiar with this system.

Amongst the features are that it can be set-up to report in the format needed for the Annual AGAR reports and to make it easier to manage multiple “reserves”.

The new system is more expensive than Kashflow (£241 per year, plus a set-up fee of around £240). Part of this cost is offset by time saved by the Clerk in preparing accounts.

See: <https://www.scribeaccounts.com/>

4. Update the Parish Council Website, Domain Name and Email Addresses

I set-up the greatlongtone.net domain in around 2002. Initially both the web-site and the associated email was sponsored by my business. After I sold the business the Council started to pay for web-site and email services provided by Kaulo. Currently the Council pays £69.90 for the web-site software, £71.88 for professional hosting of the greatlongstone.org domain and £26 per year for domain renewals for the greatlongstone.net and greatlongstone.org domains.

The website is not easy to update and is very much in need of being “revamped”.

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One option is to use a professional designer to update the website. This is likely to cost at least £500.

My preferred option is to switch to the services provided by “Parish Online Web-sites”

The annual subscription £360. (we might get a £100 government grant towards this in the first year, but there are only a limited amount of these available.

Their subscription package includes:

- Website - a modern, accessible and responsive website using the Government design guidelines
- Email - 20 mailboxes with 5GB storage each (access via webmail, or you can connect it to your own phone or computer mail apps). This means that Councillors will each get an official Parish Council email address, which makes it easier to deal with things like FOI requests.
- A Gov.uk domain – most likely www.greatlongtone-pc.gov.uk

Their service also includes:

- Hosting - the servers where your website live
- Ongoing Maintenance and Upgrades - they may have a slightly higher ongoing cost than other providers, but they say that they invest in the your service to make sure it's always the latest new features, security upgrades or updates to align to new legislation
- SSL Certificate - this keeps the site encrypted and safe for visitors
- Content Migration - they port over as much content from your current site as possible at no extra cost.
- Accessibility - their sites always follow the latest Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG), currently WCAG 2.2 AA.

Parish Online also provide what looks like very good mapping software, which I think will be useful at normal times but especially useful for the Local Plan exercise. All councillors are allowed to have their own “log-ins” to the Mapping system. It is not just restricted to the Clerk. This costs an additional £86 per year.

You can see details here: <https://www.parish-online.co.uk/>

5. Make Permanent the Parish Council’s Contact Details

In the past the contact details for the Parish Council have been those of the Clerk. This has meant that contact details have had to be changed in multiple places, with each change of clerk.

Over the years we have been gradually moving to fixed points. For instance on taking over as Clerk I was able to take on the existing parishcouncil@greatlongstone.org email address and have access to over ten years-worth of email history. If (4) above is approved this will be moved to something like “clerk@greatlongstone-pc.gov.uk

As reported under Item 16 the council now has a permanent postal address, so all that is remaining is a telephone number.

Currently we use the home or personal mobile number of the clerk.

With an increasing number of services using “Two Factor Authentication” it is important that the Council has a mobile number that moves with the Clerk. An example of why this is important is that I am struggling to get into the Government System for reclaiming VAT as the council’s account is still linked to the mobile number of a previous clerk.

Having a separate number will allow the clerk to not take “out of hours” calls, if this is not convenient.

The proposal is that the Council obtains a Sim Card that can be used by the clerk either in their own phone (if they have a dual sim phone) or otherwise in a very basic phone that the council buys. I think that this will cost about £5 per month.

6. Computer and Data Storage

I am happy using my own personal lap-top for Council work, but from the Council’s perspective this is not a satisfactory solution. The main problem is around the risk of council data being lost in a transition between Clerks. It also relies on the Clerk to ensure that data back-ups are being done, antivirus software is up to date and that the Clerk is using (and paying for) appropriate software such as Microsoft Office.

I do not think that an immediate change is required but before my term as Clerk comes to an end the Council needs to ensure that this has been sorted out and that the next person to take on the role is handed the appropriate equipment.

Linked with this will be need for a printer, and for me, more immediately a scanner.

7. Staffing Committee

The management of staff, by a Parish Council, cannot be delegated to a single person such as the Chair. Therefore, I recommend that over the coming year that the Parish Council establish a Staffing Committee that has terms of reference that include:

- Advising on the Council on employment related policies and pay
- Managing the recruitment of new clerks
- Managing the Clerk’s annual appraisals and setting of development goals
- Management of disciplinary and grievance issues