



# MELTON PARISH COUNCIL

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FRM(21)56.05

## MIGRATION TO NEW ACCOUNTING SOFTWARE SYSTEM

The current finance software, RBS Alpha, has some limitations in its functionality and usability. It can only be accessed from a fixed computer and cannot be accessed remotely. This was an issue during the lockdowns when the finance reports could only be produced in the office.

Cllr Banks and I have looked at an alternative solution – Scribe - <https://www.scribeaccounts.com/> and feel that it could be sensible to move across to this system on grounds of functionality and cost. Cllr Bank's notes are appended to this report. There is also Omega from RBS which offers more functionality than Alpha although this hasn't been investigated fully.

We could either migrate mid-year or wait until the new financial year in April 2022. January is really the latest time at which we could migrate if we went in this financial year. Having taken advice from our internal auditor his view is:

“Several of my clients use Scribe and find that it works extremely well for them. You may find you will need to run the Scribe system for a couple of months before the year end to make sure the system is running smoothly and to give you and the Council full confidence in the completion of the year-end accounting work. I do not think the transfer should cause difficulty to an auditor or significant additional work other than the need to carefully ensure that the data held in the old system has been transferred correctly to the new system. It should not involve any additional cost over the normal audit fee providing the data transfer has been completed successfully by the start of the end of year internal audit review.”

### Pros of Moving to Scribe

- New Assistant Clerk could potentially only need training on one system rather than two if we moved in January
- Year end is meant to be simpler in Scribe
- Overall should save time as using Scribe is simpler and quicker than RBS Alpha
- Can access system remotely
- Greater range of reports and reporting available on Scribe
- Councillors can have read only access to the system
- Support and system updates are included in the annual subscription
- Free training is included with Scribe
- Appears to be a programme of functional developments with Scribe, potentially incorporating bank feeds which is standard in most accountancy software (not RBS)

## **Cons of Moving to Scribe**

- Moving across in January could be too much for the office to take on and create more work
- Current system does work
- Data would need to be migrated to Scribe however this could be done by them for £300
- Scribe is more expensive (£450 annual fee and set-up fee £297). Alpha annual fee was £172 in 2020/21 but they do charge for some remote support and upgrades eg Making Tax Digital was £72.

## **Recommendations**

That members of Full Council **NOTE AND COMMENT** on this report and decide if they:

- Wish to migrate to Scribe or continue to use RBS Alpha or Omega
- If they do wish to migrate, decide when this should happen

Pip Alder

Assistant Clerk to the Council

December 2021

## **SCRIBE ACCOUNTS PACKAGE**

The Assistant Clerk has been contingency planning and asked me to look at and comment on the Scribe Accounting Package. I looked at the package's details on their website and took part in an hour-long demonstration/discussion, on-line, with Jade Hodds of Scribe, on 24 Nov 2020.

## **Evaluation**

My evaluation focussed solely on the functionality of Scribe, not on costs. I prepared, in advance, a checklist of topics I wanted to cover.

### **Overall Product**

- Scribe's suitability for use by a Parish Council (essential), on either a receipts & payments or income & expenditure basis
- Future proofing
- Track record; customer support

**Functionality**, the key features that I wanted to cover were:

Reporting (1) – statutory reports: accounts and other outputs to meet the auditors' requirements; VAT returns

Reporting (2) – reports to management (inc. outputs to Excel?)

Useability (3) –

- ease of data capture (bank feeds?);
- security;
- ease of use;
- account coding system;
- bank recs;
- how it manages budgets (and budget profiles?);
- budget forecasting tools;
- how it manages expenditure that may be financed from different funds (e.g. general reserve & CIL& earmarked reserves);
- year-end accrual systems; balance sheet accounting etc.

### **My Comments**

I worked through my check-list with Jade Hodds and there were no issues about Scribe that gave me concern. I am satisfied that Scribe could meet all our accounting requirements.

I particularly like the fact that Scribe:

- is designed specifically for the use by Parish & Town Councils. In other words, it is not a generic commercial accounting package like Sage
- is a web-based application, offering wider (but controlled) access and improved security
- is a mature product, with a well-established client base among Parish & Town councils and an active user group.
- has a clear product-development programme

Its other features of note were:

- a more modern interface
- more flexible input of transaction data and the promise of bank feeds in the near future
- an ability to attach images of invoices to payment transactions
- an ability to profile budgets
- a Budget Forecasting module
- a Sales Ledger
- an Asset Register

For clients who plan to start using Scribe from 1 April in any year, the company advises that preparatory work should start from the previous January.

### **Conclusion**

For contingency planning purposes, Scribe would be a safe and more than adequate option in place of Alpha.

On a straight comparison with Alpha, I regard Scribe to have better functionality and better future prospects. If the Responsible Financial Officer were to recommend it as a replacement (and if the costs were reasonable), I would support the proposal.

WB

24 Nov 2020