

Banking Arrangements - Lloyds

V1 13/4/21

1 Summary

RPC has had a number of issues with our current bankers over the past few years. Although parts of their offering work very well, the mistakes and difficulty of operation have brought many frustrations and wasted considerable time.

It has been said many times by clerks that this is because the big banks don't understand parish councils. However, there is one bank that specialises in bodies such as parish council and receives universal praise from Clerks – Unity Trust Bank.

I recommend we transfer the council's current and savings accounts to Unity.

2 Experience with our current bankers

Below are some examples of issues with our current bankers over the past few years:

- Retaining old signatories when asked to remove them
- Difficulties getting new signatories registered
- Apparent inability to set up some members for internet banking
- Issuing debit cards when asked not to
- Issuing authentication cards to ex members who are no longer signatories
- Suddenly sending balance texts to the last-clerk-but-two and appearing unable to prevent this
- Apparent inability to register a device as trusted
- Long-winded access to human assistance

We are not alone in these kinds of issues with our current bankers. Neither are they the only one of the big banks that parish councils have problems with. It just seems to be that the big banks either offer a poor service to everybody, or just do so with councils.

3 Unity Trust Bank

3.1 Overview

Unity Trust (<https://www.unity.co.uk/>) was set up as a joint venture between the Co-op bank and the trade union movement. It originally only provided accounts for unions and voluntary organisations but now seems to have gone fully commercial. It has a peerless reputation amongst clerks for efficiency, ease of use, flexibility and responsiveness. Here's a typical comment by a clerk on Facebook:

"They are a great bank and I cannot imagine why any Council would not move to them"

For more views from clerks, see the appendix below.

They also have some particular advantages based on our recent experience:

- Communications are sent to signatories' home addresses rather than having to be forwarded from the corporate one.
- They don't use authentication cards and machines with batteries that fail.
- The statement system is fully online and paperless. With our current bankers, proper monthly statements can only be obtained by post, and pdf statements are only available for current accounts.

- All admin is done online and doesn't require paper forms to be sent to signatories, unlike our current bankers.
- It's a fair bet they can spell properly, unlike our current bankers:

ROCKSDOWN PARISH COUNCIL
MR MARTING WHITTAKER

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3.2 My experience

I've been banking with Unity for one of my companies for 12 years and had excellent service. I persuaded Hook PC to move to them after trouble with Lloyds and they were equally impressed. I recently recommended them to the RCA, who now bank with them.

3.3 The costs

Unity charge £6 per month for a current account. This compares with £7.20 a month I pay to Lloyds for my other company. We currently pay nothing to our current bankers as we have a Treasurer's account, though this may go some distance to explain the poor service we receive.

The other cost is for a charge card. This is essential for a council, as using private cards and claiming the money back is expressly forbidden by Financial Regs. As Unity does offer a debit card, they offer a charge card that costs £3 per month. It also has a setup fee of £50.

4 Recommendation

That the council moves its current and savings accounts to Unity. This should be done before new councillors arrive in May, to avoid the issues associated with our existing bankers.

Martin Whittaker

Clerk and RFO

APPENDIX - Comments by parish clerks

The national clerks' group on Facebook were recently asked the question:

- Who currently banks with Unity Trust and how long have you banked with them?

Responses were:

- Hi have been with unity around 3 years now, **best thing I ever did!** Easy to add signatories and cheques can be paid in over the counter at NatWest
- Yes - I've had 4 different councils with UTB over the past 12 years. There is absolutely **NOTHING bad to say about them**. I've even just opened a bank for my husband's business with them too. I post cheques and pay in cash at the post office
- I have been with Unity for seven years. **Cannot recommend them highly enough**.
- Been with them a few years, **wouldn't change them**.
- Been **excellent**, over 4 years, council and charity accounts
- I use them at my two councils - one small and one a town council. They **are excellent**.
- We switched in January and love **how easy it is**
- Been with them for 5 years and **all positive**.
- Been with Unity 7 years, precept £128k. **Highly recommended**.
- We've been with them a couple of years and have **no issues whatsoever**.
- Easy to manage the account, make payments, set up DDs etc **not a single issue** so far
- We have been with Unity for about 5 years. We only do online stuff with them though. No cash/cheques as we have another bank for this. **Unity are good** as far as I'm concerned. precept £70k but We have lots of CIL to do I'm dealing with lots of banks to ...
- Been with them about 4 years, **no problems** so far.
- Been with them about 6 years with various councils ranging from £2K income to £250K. **Highly recommend** for any size council. I've generally found when there's a change of clerk, it's easier to change banks than to change the address with eg Barclays or ...
- **They are a great bank and I cannot imagine why any Council would not move to them**
- **Best bank**, so helpful and very easy to get hold of if you have a problem.
- Been with them over 5 years, took on a new PC with Barclays and got them to move over to unity. Super quick, great customer service. Can pay in cheques via free post or NatWest Counters abs **can't fault them** at all. A win all round for us
- We started with 2 of my councils in the past month and it is like a **breath of fresh air!** Humans that answer the phones and will speak to me about the account, easy online payments without having to be a signatory...**I love it** as do my councils!
- **I can't say enough good**. I hope you can convince them to make the switch!!
- I'm not sure how long my PC has been with them as I've only been in post since November but I've found them **really easy** to contact by phone, **straightforward to change** mandates and primary contact details and their online banking **is easy to use**.
- All my councils even little ones with Unity. **Soooo easy to use**. Pay car park cash in through post office to Unity.