



Report on Accounting Software Review for Minehead Town Council

Background

Under Section 151 of the Local Government Act 1972, councils must make arrangements for the proper administration of their financial affairs. Additionally, the Accounts and Audit Regulations 2015 and the Local Audit & Accountability Act 2014 require councils to maintain accurate financial records. These statutory obligations necessitate robust financial management systems.

Minehead Town Council currently uses Rialtas Omega accounting software, which is designed for local government and supports compliance requirements such as the Annual Governance and Accountability Return (AGAR) and precept management. Over recent years, the Council has relied increasingly on this system to produce reports for councillors and the public, aiming to improve financial transparency. However, these reports have often been difficult to interpret and have often raised more questions than they answer.

The current system also presents usability challenges:

- Charges are applied per user.
- The interface is not intuitive.
- Correcting errors is cumbersome due to strict audit controls.

Given these concerns, councillors have expressed interest in exploring alternative solutions that are easier to use, more transparent and better integrated with other council functions.

Needs

The Council requires an accounting solution that:

- Complies fully with local government financial regulations.
- Produces clear, accessible reports for councillors and the public.
- Offers user-friendly functionality for day-to-day financial management.
- Ensure system access can be distributed across the team to avoid reliance on a single user and prevent operational bottlenecks
- Provides integration with other operational areas (e.g., allotments, cemeteries, venue bookings).
- Delivers good value for money and efficient support.

Options

Option 1 – Rialtas Omega (Current Supplier)

Usability: Omega is a comprehensive double-entry accounting system designed for larger councils. While powerful, it has a steep learning curve and a dated interface. Editing past transactions is restricted to maintain audit integrity, making error correction challenging.

Council-Specific Functionality: Purpose-built for councils, Omega supports compliance requirements but lacks modern features such as file attachments, drill-down reporting and streamlined authorisation workflows. Integration with other Rialtas modules exists but is not seamless.

Overall Assessment: Omega remains a strong choice for councils with complex financial needs. However, its complexity, additional training costs and limited modern features may not align with the Council's desire for simplicity and transparency.

Costs: For 2026/27, Rialtas is projected to cost £858 (excluding VAT) for the annual subscription, plus £872 (excluding VAT) for the year-end closedown and new-year setup service. This latter service is not part of the package but is currently utilised by the Council. Rialtas offers optional add-on features such as additional users, asset management, and cemetery modules, all at extra cost. At present, Minehead Town Council does not use any of these add-ons. The existing contract runs until 1st April 2027 and requires six months' notice for termination. The early termination cost is £858. Rialtas reviews its fees every three years in line with the new contract period, with prices fixed for the duration of that period.

<https://rialtas.co.uk/>

Option 2 – Scribe

Usability: Scribe is a cloud-based platform with an intuitive interface and prides itself on its customer support. It offers free training and responsive assistance, making it accessible for clerks and RFOs of all experience levels.

Council-Specific Functionality: Designed specifically for parish and town councils, Scribe supports AGAR preparation, VAT returns, budget monitoring, and asset registers. Optional modules include allotments, cemeteries, and venue bookings. Role-based access control enhances security and collaboration.

Overall Assessment: With over 1,500 councils using Scribe, it is widely recognised as a market leader. Its ease of use and sector-specific features make it ideal for councils seeking clarity and compliance. Larger councils with corporate-style reporting needs may still prefer Omega or Sage. It is also a sister company to the recently adopted Civic.ly asset management software. While the two systems are not

yet fully integrated, it is anticipated that they will, in time, work closely together to provide continuity between asset management and accounts.

Cost: Scribe offers several packages, all of which include a setup fee. For the accounts-only option, the setup cost is £999, with an additional £499 to import three years of accounts from Rialtas. Ongoing costs are £129 per month (or £1,548 per year).

Optional modules include:

- Bookings: £59 per month
- Cemetery: £59 per month
- Allotments: £45 per month

The current proposal waives the setup fee for the optional modules (bookings, cemetery and allotments), which adds value at the outset. However, these modules would still incur additional monthly charges on top of the core package cost of £129 per month. If councillors wish to consider Scribe as an alternative system, it is strongly recommended that the full package be adopted. The accounts module and professional services are designed to work together and only by taking the complete package can the Council maximise functionality and efficiency. Scribe's fees are reviewed annually in line with inflation but it does not always result in a price increase.

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

Option 3 – Easy PC Accounts

Usability: Easy PC Accounts offers a simple cashbook system that is highly user-friendly and cost-effective, particularly for smaller councils.

Council-Specific Functionality: While suitable for basic bookkeeping, it lacks advanced features such as HMRC integration, invoicing, purchase order management, and statutory reporting tools. It does not provide modules for operational areas like allotments or cemeteries.

Overall Assessment: Best suited for small councils with straightforward financial workflows. It may not meet the needs of Minehead Town Council given its broader operational requirements.

Cost: Full costings for this option have not yet been confirmed, but they are expected to be broadly in line with the current Rialtas costs. Similar to Rialtas, this system also offers additional features that can be added for an extra charge.

<https://mijan-consulting.co.uk/easy-pc-accounts/>

Finance and Legal Considerations

Minehead Town Council currently has sufficient budget to continue with the existing Rialtas package. Any change in accounting software would not take effect during this financial year. Therefore, it will be for the Council to ensure that an appropriate budget is allocated for whichever system is chosen from the next financial year, as part of the budget-setting process in January.

Legal obligations include:

- **Local Government Act 1972 Section 151:** Proper administration of financial affairs.
- **Accounts and Audit Regulations 2015 & Local Audit & Accountability Act 2014:** Maintenance of accurate financial records.

Accessibility and transparency of financial reports are essential for compliance and public confidence.

Recommendation

The Council is asked to:

- Review the options presented for accounting software.
- Consider key factors including usability, compliance, integration potential and overall cost implications.
- Provide instruction to the Clerk on whether to retain the current Rialtas system or transition to an alternative solution, specifying any agreed timeframes for implementation and transfer.

Ben Parker
Town Clerk
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