

DUNSTER PARISH COUNCIL

MINUTES OF THE PARISH COUNCIL MEETING HELD AT DUNSTER TITHE BARN ON
13th November 2023 7.00pm

Attendees

Councillors: Geoff Dibble (Chair), Chris Oliver, Jackie Meakes, James Morley, Peter Finney, Carol Ell, Tessa Williams, Tony Melnyk, Kevin Sully and Alan Vicary

Clerk: Mrs Sarah Towells

Other: Marcus Kravis (SC) 2 Business owners representing Tom Deer

Apologies

Councillors: None

Other: Christine Lawrence (SC), Jeni Fender, Anne Way

23/147 To note apologies for absence: As noted above.

23/148 Any New Declarations of interest and dispensations: There were none.

23/149 Minutes of the Meeting held on Monday 09th October 2023 for approval: It was resolved to approve the minutes.

23/150 Somerset Councillor Report: Cllr Kravis reported: Somerset Council are taking action to address social care funding blackhole, the latest budget figures which go before Somerset Council's Executive on 8 November are expected to show an estimated £70m increase in expected adult social care costs for 2024/25. This means the Council cannot rely on reserves to cover the gap for next year and without action will need to issue a S114 notice, or effectively declare the council bankrupt, at the point of setting next year's budget in February. Several councils nationally have been forced to do this in recent months, including Woking and Birmingham, with many others warning it could be a possibility without Government support. Cllr Liz Leyshon, Somerset Council's Lead Member for Resources and Deputy Leader said: "The funding model for local Government is clearly broken, with many councils struggling in light of soaring costs and demands on services. "But while at Woking and Birmingham their finances were also impacted by a policy decision or legal action, here in Somerset we are simply running out of money due to the soaring costs of demand-led services, particularly the costs of residential and nursing care for adults. "This is not because of poor control of service spend, it is simply an exceptionally large increase in our costs for demand-led services which we have no choice but to manage." In August, Somerset Council warned that it would need to use reserves to balance the books for this year. Latest figures show the budget gap for the current financial year now stands at £27.3m. Although this figure could be covered by reserves, the projected shortfall for the following year is now £100m, far exceeding levels of reserves. The main driver of this is an £70m increase in adult social care costs, caused by proposed changes to national policy which aimed to make the cost of care fairer. Although the policy change was later abandoned by Government, in Somerset this has led to significant rises in the costs of residential and nursing care placements. For example, residential care placement costs have risen from around £577 per week in 2022/23 to £900 per week next year. Officers are now drawing up savings proposals which will be voted on by Executive at its December meeting. These could include selling assets and buildings, including offices; increasing Council Tax, fees and charges as much as possible; reducing staffing levels; and reducing council services to statutory levels. Cllr Leyshon added: "Our priority will be to maximise all opportunities, work with partners and do everything we can to ensure we can continue to take care of those most in need. "No-one wants to be in this position, but we are well aware of the implications of a Section 114 notice. It is our intention to take the difficult decisions now and to set a direction for the new Council with the benefit of our local knowledge and commitment to Somerset. "The alternative is to leave it to Government Commissioners, paid by the people of Somerset, to find a financial answer that does not take into account local factors or experience."

23/151 Accounts

23/151.1 Approval of expenditure: It was resolved to pay the payments on the attached list via internet banking except for PAYE and A Ell, which would be by cheque.

23/151.2 Current account expenditure analysis for October 2023: It was resolved to note the figures. These were signed by Cllr Finney.

23/151.3 Bank reconciliation for October 2023: It was resolved to note the bank reconciliation which was signed by Cllr Finney.

23/151.4 Buttercross Orchard balance: It was resolved to note the update figures.

23/151.5 Budget Monitoring: It was resolved to note the budget monitoring which were signed by Cllr Finney.

23/151.6 PAYE figures for October: These were checked and signed by Cllr Meakes.

23/151.8 Dunster Working Group – Bank account: It was resolved to note the new account was now open.

23/152 Planning: There were no applications to discuss.

23/153 Toilets: The Clerk reported that R Sherrin from Carhampton would look at the leaking roof. The automatic lock on the mother and baby unit had been changed but it was still not working. The Clerk had contacted G A Sully and Sons Ltd, and they would look at it prior to us paying the invoice.

23/128.1 Business Sponsorship for toilets: The letter had been either hand delivered to emailed to business's in Dunster. The Clerk had received four emailed responses and the Chairman had received two. Only one business was represented at the meeting. It was resolved to investigate card machine costs and get a quote to take the mother and baby cubicle onto mains drainage. Discussions took place about closing both the ladies and the gents and only keep the two individual unisex cubicles.

23/154 Cemetery: The Clerk had received no quotes to date. Fencing companies deem it too small a job and handyman deem it too large. The Clerk would try to get more quotes to discuss at the next meeting.

23/155 Allotments:

23/155.1 Hedge from Hangers Way into Allotment: It was resolved Cllr Sully would ask the Cemetery contractor to cut it back.

23/156 Buttercross Orchard: Apple pressing had gone well.

23/157 Riverside Walk: Cllr Vicary had spoken to someone on the telephone, but the fence has still not been repaired. The Clerk would chase this.

23/158 Correspondence

23/158.1 LCN Meeting: The next meeting would be held on 5th December at 6.30pm.

23/159 Risk Register: It was resolved to note there were no updates.

23/160 Highways: Cllr Williams had circulated an email outlining further damaged property through Dunster. Cllr Lawrence was sending this onto Highways.

23/161 Additional Defibrillators: The Clerk had submitted a Listed Building application to put the defibrillator on the Chapel in West Street. ENP had come back with an extensive list of requirements to send in with the application. It was resolved to look at alternative ideas and withdraw the planning application.

It was resolved to renew the contract for the defibs at Riverside Gardens and Luttrell arms and to have three new ones – One on Tithe Barn, one at the Timber shed down Dunster marsh and one on the Outside of the doctor's surgery.

23/162 Dunster Parking Review: There was no update, Cllr Kravis has tried to contact Steve Deakin with no luck. He would now seek to go above his head to find out where we are with the review.

23/163 Old Cemetery Gate: It was resolved to note no more quotes had come in. It was further resolved to get new quotes to have matching gates that are there on the school.

23/164 Broken Post at Tithe Barn: It was resolved to note this had been done.

23/165 Disaster Recovery Plan for Dunster PC: It was resolved to remove this item from the agenda.

23/166 Weed spraying map for the village: It was resolved Cllrs Sully and Vicary would look at this. It was further resolved that Cllr Vicary would contact the contractor and ask him to spray the village again.

23/167 Bike Racks: The Clerk had sent photos to highways of where we would like to place a bike rack but no response yet.

23/168 Items to Report and matters for the next meeting to be held on Monday 11th December 2023:

Succession planning for Butter Cross Orchard and Riverside gardens.

Funding for the Church Clock.

The farmer had blocked footpath WL3/1.

Meeting closed 9.15 p.m.

Signed Date.....