

Minutes of Yarnscombe Parish Council Meeting
Wednesday 6 December 2023
— D R A F T —

Present: Cllrs. Brice (chair), Cooke, Ellison, Farr, Jeffery, Newberry, Pengilley, Cllr. Elliott (Torridge District Council / TDC), Cllr. Saywell (Devon County Council / DCC), M. Dymond (clerk) and representative of Village Hall / Social Club Committee

23.118 Apologies, Declarations of Interests and Dispensations

Apologies were received and accepted from Cllr. Lock and PCSO Brown. There were no declarations of interest and no requests for dispensations had been received.

23.119 Public Participation and Feedback

Clerk had received Freedom of Information request from Cllr. Hackett regarding Cllr. Morrish and his attendance at council meetings when he was representing Yarnscombe as district councillor. Clerk had provided facts based on previous minutes. Cllr. Saywell (DCC) advised caution, as Cllrs. Hackett and Morrish were in direct competition.

Cllr. Ellison explained that in future he could provide guidance regarding FOI requests.

23.120 Representatives Reports

1) County/District Councillors

County:

Devolution — It has now been announced that the Government have approved a Devolution Deal in principle for Devon and Torbay (Plymouth have dropped out). Negotiations on finer details remain ongoing but at the very least the deal will involve a £16 million fund for environmental skills and infrastructure projects, a devolved Adult/Further Education Budget which will involve a closer working relationship with Petroc and Exeter Colleges, further funding for local transport infrastructure projects, and a joint investment plan for housing, working with Homes England to unlock potential affordable housing sites. More details as and when they are announced.

Budget Position — Currently there is a projected £13.6m overspend on DCC's budget for this financial year, mainly relating to pressures on Adult Social Care and Children's Social Care placements. Work is ongoing to address the overspend and I would, at this stage, expect this number to come down as we get towards the end of the financial year. It is important that we do so. A restructuring of Council staff teams has started. Although the Council has enough in reserves to cover off this overspend, experience from other Councils shows us that if you don't tackle the overspend in year, they usually continue and get worse in the following financial year(s). An example of that is our neighbours in Somerset who, unlike Devon, failed to balance their budget last year and had to take £18 million out of their reserves to cover the overspend. They had to take money out of their reserves again this year to set a budget and are now facing a projected overspend of £21 million this financial year.

Mobile Libraries — Cabinet upheld the decision to end the Mobile Library service, which will cease at the end of February. There are a number of alternative measures including:

- Using nearest library building (the mobile van did stop at several stops very near to Torrington Library, including a residential street within the town).
- Using the Home Library Service — volunteers collecting and delivering books to people.
- Using the Good Neighbour Scheme — similar to the home library service but instead nominating friends and family to collect/deliver books. This is an already established scheme in Devon and across the country and has had a good track record.
- Increased use of digital subscriptions/reading options.
- Developing a rural outreach / Community Libraries.

- The Council is looking to run a number of pilots with different community libraries. Books can be ordered in advance with a delivery/drop off at a village hall or other community location for collection by residents on a 2 or 4 week lending cycle. Library books currently move all around Devon — for example if you ordered a book from Torrington Library that was in Ivybridge or Axminster, it will be moved to Torrington for you to collect. The plan is to utilise this delivery network to get books out into the community. Further funding (£15,000) will be made available for grants to support the setting up of Community Libraries via the Growing Communities Fund. A further £25,000 transition fund will also be used to support vulnerable users to access alternative provision. The old mobile service cost over £200,000 a year to run, the majority of that on staffing costs. Leasing 4 new vehicles for 5 years would have added an extra £160,000 on top of those costs. Purchasing four new vehicles was estimated to be over £600,000. Along with the high costs, across the whole of Torrington Rural in 2022 on average 83.6 people were using the van out of a population of 14,293, so an average of 0.58% of the population. I want more people to be accessing the library service in the countryside, but it is clear to me we have to develop different ways of delivering this service as the old mobile van was no longer, sadly, accessible enough for many of our residents and as you'll have seen from the figures above, not cost effective to run.

Highways — Thanks to the cancellation of HS2 DCC will be receiving an extra £6.7 million this financial year for capital highways funding. It will be followed by the same amount next year, and then there will be a minimum of £208.6 million between now and 2033/34. I will be working with my Neighbourhood Highways Officer to put further sites in Torrington Rural forward for consideration for patching and resurfacing.

Dragon Patching of sites in Torrington Rural has now largely finished for the year with the weather becoming more autumnal. We are now looking at sites for Dragon Patching next year and with my Neighbourhood Highways Officer we are looking at potential sites within or adjoining Yarnscombe.

Support for residents struggling with the Cost of Living — DCC has received funding from Central Government via the Household Support Fund to help residents struggling with the cost of living crisis. For this coming winter, Devon's district and city councils have over £2 million to offer 'one-off' financial help to those who are struggling to pay for their food and utility costs or other household essentials. Help may also be available for unexpected or exceptional circumstances, for example, rent arrears prior to being in receipt of appropriate housing benefits. DCC are also working with the Devon Community Foundation to provide grants to voluntary sector organisations supporting communities that don't always get the help they need. Their 'Food, Fuel and More' grant scheme was very well received earlier this year and will re-open this winter with a further funding pot of over £260,000. The scheme will offer large grants of up to £25,000 to organisations that support homeless people or people in temporary or insecure housing. Further details as to what help can be provided can be found online at <https://www.devon.gov.uk/cost-of-living/>.

Cllr. Newberry raised the issue of Bustley Bridge which, when it rains, gets always flooded. Detailed statistics comparing the absentee rates between DCC and "Private" not yet available.

Actions taken: Cllr. Newberry to send more details re. Bustley Bridge to Cllr. Saywell. Data on absentee rates to be presented next meeting.

District:

Clerk had circulated email regarding slurry, at present no further issues. The Old Creamery in Taddipport is being demolished. The percentage of affordable housing in TDC stands at 21%. The trial of using the first electric bin lorry had been unsuccessful. Cllr. Pengilly presented a TDC Climate Action Chart and asked who at TDC is responsible for climate action. The chart comprised 8 categories and, out of 162 councils, TDC was in 146th place.

Actions taken: Cllr. Elliott to find out more information and report back next month.

2) Village Hall/Social Club — Feedback from AGM

Committee member explained that there is a problem with the heating, in process of being looked at, to be repaired. Committee room itself is not well insulated, therefore not easy to heat and keep warm. The issue of a light at the gate to the path leading to Northchurch Farm was raised. Cllr. Newberry to attend further Committee meetings.

Actions taken: Committee representative to create link to PC.

3) Youth Club — None

4) PCSO/Police Report — No crimes reported, no call logs created. Cllr. Pengilly attended online meeting, four participants. Issues discussed were noise in South Street car park and drug abuse in Torrington Square.

Actions taken: Await invite to next online meeting.

5) Playing Field — Invoice for grass cutting £537.60

Cllr. Brice proposed, Cllr. Pengilly seconded. All councillors agreed to pay invoice.

Actions taken: Cheque written out, countersigned and handed to Cllr. Cooke who will pass it on to Fred Turner.

6) Snow Warden — salt grit

There is plenty of salt grit available, but the snow gritter has been out of action due to the motor developing a fault. New part has been ordered and is on the way.

Actions taken: Progress report on repair next month.

23.121 Minutes of Meeting from 25 October 2023

Minutes were approved and signed off as a true record.

23.122 Matters arising from last Meeting

Reimbursement of Cllr. Brice for purchase of SIM card £74.99

Purchase of SIM card had been decided upon at last meeting. Cllr. Pengilly proposed, Cllr. Cooke seconded. All agreed to reimburse Cllr. Brice.

Actions taken: Cheque written out, countersigned and handed to Cllr. Brice.

Feedback re. Slurry Complaint — see item 23.120/1

23.123 Geoffrey Cox Correspondence

Conditions of Roads petition, Royal Mail and Broadband in rural areas

Clerk had circulated correspondence and issues raised to be discussed at a later point.

Actions taken: None at present.

Setting of precept and date of next meeting — TDC full council will set council tax base on 12 December 2023. Completed precept forms have to be sent back by 25 January 2024. Usually, our parish council's first meeting in 2024 would be on 24 January, but to ensure that precept forms reach TDC in plenty of time, meeting date was put forward to 17 January 2024.

Actions taken: Inform district and county councillors of change of date, publish new date on website and Facebook.

23.124 PROW Monthly Report

Repairs on foot paths ongoing, no further updates available.

23.125 Planning

Conversion of barn to one dwelling including creation of new access, Barn at Grid Reference 252997 122434, Yarnscombe, Devon, Ref. No.: [1/0849/2023/FUL](#) — Application permitted

23.126 Additional Planning

None

23.127 Accounts

Grass Cutting Invoice: £537.60 see item 23.120/5

Cllr. Brice reimbursement SIM card £74.99 see item 23.122

Meeting closed 8.25pm.

19th December 2023