

**Minutes of Yarnscombe Parish Council Meeting
Wednesday 22 January 2025**

Present: Cllrs. Brice (chair), Ellison, Farr, Jeffery, Pengilly, Saywell (Devon County Council / DCC) and M. Dymond (Clerk)

25.1 Apologies, Declarations of Interests and Dispensations

Apologies had been received and accepted from Cllrs. Elliott(TDC), Cooke and Newberry.

There had been no declarations of interest and no requests for dispensations had been received.

25.2 Public Participation and Feedback

Chair had received complaint about condition of road between Huntshaw Cross — Cranford Cross from a parishioner in a neighbouring parish. Chair had passed on details on how to report potholes and other faults to Highways at DCC, he also asked Cllr. Saywell to get in contact with parishioner and offer reassurance that concerns are noted.

Actions taken: Cllr. Saywell will contact Mark James (Highways Officer) to get more information before getting back to parishioner.

25.3 Representatives Reports

1) County/District Councillors

County

The English Devolution White Paper was published just before Christmas. An extract from the minister's letter probably gives some explanation as to where we are heading as residents in a two tier area. (Link to information about Devolution White Paper will be included in next Eagle article).

Local government reorganisation. My intention is to formally invite unitary proposals in January 2025 from all councils in two-tier areas, and small neighbouring unitary councils. In this invitation I will set out further detail on the criteria I will consider when taking decisions on the proposals that are submitted to Government. I intend to ask for interim plans by March 2025. As set out in the White Paper, new unitary councils must be the right size to achieve efficiencies, improve capacity and withstand financial shocks. For most areas, this will mean creating councils with a population of 500,000 or more. However, there may be exceptions to ensure new structures make sense for an area, including on devolution. Final decisions will be made on a case-by-case basis. We will ask you to work with other councils in your area to develop unitary proposals that are in the best interests of the whole area, rather than developing competing proposals.

In the White Paper the Government has explicitly issued a direction to Councils in two tier areas to reorganise into unitary authorities and to look towards setting up strategic Combined Authorities with an elected Mayor. In our case in Devon, that would mean a Combined Authority and elected Mayor for Devon and Cornwall. This would replace the recently set up Combined Devon and Torbay Authority which was agreed with the previous Government.

Statement from Cllr. Saywell:

Following publication of the Government's Devolution White Paper it is clear that considerable change is going to happen in Local Government in Devon. The County Council is going to be abolished, as will all the Devon District Councils.

We have two options:

- 1. Do nothing and the government will impose changes.*
- 2. Engage with government to get the best result for the residents of Devon.*

I believe that engagement with the government is the better option.

While I may not agree with all the government's proposals, I need to do everything I can to ensure that the changes will make local government sustainable for the long term and able to withstand shocks like the pandemic, the war in Ukraine and the world financial crisis. At the heart of all this must be a stronger voice

to inform the government of the issues my residents in Torrington Rural and the residents in the wider area of Devon face.

The shape and size of the new unitary council(s) is the discussion that will come next, and will no doubt be contentious. The Devon District Council Leaders have said they don't want a single Devon unitary council as it is too big. However, if you start to carve up Devon then be careful of what you wish for. We here in Torrington Rural and Torridge run the risk of being left in a rump rural unitary authority which isn't viable, or as an appendage to a 'greater Exeter' council. For this reorganisation to work I believe the new authority will need to cover both Exeter and as large a rural area as possible to create a balanced authority that is not skewed to one population centre.

However, those discussions will come as the Government wants draft proposals submitted by March, discussions in the summer and a final proposal agreed in September.

County Council elections are due in May 2025. However, if we are to stick to this timetable the practicality of holding an election is somewhat limited. Councillors elected in May will be planning their redundancy in September. And under this timetable we would likely be having elections to the new 'shadow' unitary authority in May 2026, possibly followed by a Mayoral election in May 2027.

There are significant decisions over the future of Highways, Libraries and Youth Services, to name just 3 areas, that need to be taken in the coming years. These cannot be done if we drag out the reorganisation process over many years. It is in everyone's interests that this is done in as timely and efficient a way as possible.

However, this will ultimately be the Government's decision. They may choose to continue with the elections. But election or no election, it is clear that Devon County Council and Torridge District Council are going to cease to exist in a few short years and will be replaced by a new unitary council. I will do all that I can to defend the interests of Torrington Rural as we go through this period of change.

District

No new report for January. Cllr. Elliott requested confirmation as to whether the council had responded to the Draft Housing Strategy and if the email re. TDC Listed Buildings had been received.

Actions taken: Clerk had not received mail re. listed buildings and asked for it to be re-sent. The Council had not engaged with the Draft Housing Strategy, due to the White Paper concerning devolution.

2) Village Hall / Social Club — Cllrs. Newberry and Farr are now committee members.

3) Youth Club — None

4) PCSO/Police Report — End of service for PCSO Brown

At the moment, no new contact exists. Team meetings are still taking place online, clerk will email PCSO Baker and ask for advance warning of meetings taking place.

Actions taken: Await response from PCSO Baker.

5) Playing Field — None

6) Snow warden — Cllr. Farr gritted road when icy.

25.4 Minutes of meeting of 11 December 2024

Minutes were approved and signed off as a true record.

25.5 Matters arising from last meeting

Electronic Payment switchover — Clerk had contacted internal auditor for advice, who had no concerns. Cllr. Pengilly had approached Lloyds bank for relevant form, so online payments can be made. He will draw up "Schedule of Payment" that will have to be signed and dated at each meeting.

Actions taken: Once online form is approved, electronic payment system will be put in place.

25.6 New Matters

Disposal of old PC documents stored in Village Hall

After a recent Fire assessment at the village hall, it became apparent that a large volume of documents stored in the hall need to be moved. The council is one of the village organisations which uses the hall at present

for storage. Clerk had asked for advice regarding retention of documents. The internal auditor had pointed out a policy set up by another council. Cllr. Pengilley will use this as a starting point to draw up Yarnscombe Parish Council's own policy. Cllrs. Brice and Newberry volunteered to look through stored documents and decide which ones can be destroyed or need to be kept. Documents like "Minutes" are already backed up on computer. Any paper documents that need to be kept will need to be stored in fireproof boxes which council would need to purchase. The fire assessment of the hall included advice to have doors replaced with up-to-date fire doors; Cllrs. Farr and Newberry will keep councillors informed of developments.

Actions taken: Cllrs. Brice and Newberry to update council at next meeting.

Yearly Eagle Invoice £60 — Clerk had received invoice which was presented and signed at meeting. Cllr. Brice proposed, Cllr. Pengilley seconded, all agreed to pay invoice.

Actions taken: Cheque written out and countersigned. Clerk will pass on cheque to Eagle editor.

25.7 PROW Monthly Report

None

25.8 Planning

Honeysuckle Cottage, Yarnscombe, Barnstaple, EX31 3LX

Erection of ground floor extension to include extended living room, extra bedroom and garage, Ref. No.: [1/0887/2024/FUL](#) — Permitted

25.9 Additional Planning

Highfield, Yarnscombe, Barnstaple, Devon, EX31 3LR, Ref. No.: [1/0044/2025/FUL](#), Demolition of garage and porch, erection of single storey extension — Councillors had no objections.

Actions taken: Clerk to inform planning department of councillors' comments.

25.10 Accounts

Eagle Invoice £60 — see item 25.09

Bank reconciliation October 2024 to December 2024

Bank reconciliation had been carried out and cash book signed.

Meeting ended at 8.25pm.

11th February 2025