

**Minutes of Yarnscombe Parish Council Meeting  
Wednesday 26 February 2025**

Present: Cllrs. Brice (chair), Cooke, Ellison, Farr, Jeffery, Newberry, Pengilly, Cllr. Elliott (Torrige District Council / TDC) and M. Dymond (Clerk)

25.11 Apologies, Declarations of Interests and Dispensations

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

25.12 Public Participation and Feedback — Goalposts

Parishioner had repeatedly asked for goal posts in playing field to be moved to ensure that air ambulance can land if ever needed. Cllr. Ellison moved goal posts, but it was noted that goal posts can easily be moved again by anyone wanting to use them.

**Actions taken:** As weather improves and likelihood of children/adults using playing field increases, clerk will ask anyone using goal posts to put them back to edge of field in next article of Eagle.

25.13 Representatives Reports

1) County/District Councillors

*County*

*Devolution/Local Government Reorganisation*

The Government have announced that the DCC Elections for May 2025 will still be going ahead. Unfortunately, they have also confirmed their intention to abolish the County and District Councils and replace DCC and TDC with a new unitary council.

Following the announcement in the House of Commons we received another letter from the Minister of State for Local Government. In that letter the Government have instructed all councils in Devon — the 8 Districts, the County Council and the Plymouth and Torbay unitary councils — to submit an 'interim plan' to the Government by the 21st March. They then expect full and final proposals to be submitted by 28th November. If the Minister accepts the proposal, they would then, according to his letter to local councils, look to hold elections to the new 'shadow' unitary council(s) as soon as possible.

So potentially good news for election aficionados. We will have elections in May this year for the County Council and then potentially have elections for the new shadow unitary council in May next year . . .

Do I think this scenario will definitely happen? If I were a betting man I think it more likely that the new unitary elections will take place in May 2027 instead of the District Council Elections. However, I wouldn't rule anything out in this ever-changing environment we now live in. What I do think is that it will be extremely unlikely to find a consensus between 11 councils as to what the future of local government in Devon will look like. There are frankly too many organisations, too many opinions and bluntly too many vested interests for everyone to agree that 'X' or 'Y' solution is the way forward. It is more likely to happen that competing proposals will be submitted to the Government. They will then take a decision and impose it on us, whether we like it or not. I also think it highly unlikely that this process will be agreed within the year. Leaving aside the elections, the Government have already prioritised 8 other council areas to reorganise ahead of Devon. Any delays in those areas will likely have a knock on consequence for us.

But regardless of all that, whether we like it or not, the Government have set a deadline to put in interim proposals in March. There appears to be no scope for waiting until after the elections, and I feel it would be a dereliction of duty just to sit on my hands and say nothing and let other Councils like Plymouth, Torbay and Exeter dictate to us and the Government over what the future representation of Torrington Rural should look like without the involvement of the County Council.

A new County Council elected in May might decide to rip up those interim plans but that would be their prerogative. What I would say however, is that the longer this goes on for the more likely it is to have an adverse effect on day to day services. For example the Highways, Youth Services and Libraries contracts are all up for renewal in the next 2 years. The HR Payroll software system is up for renewal, and there will be

other contracts and decisions about other service provisions due in the next 3–4 years.

If we are still arguing over what the new unitary council(s) should look like by this time next year then it goes without saying that taking decisions on the future of youth services, etc. is going to be difficult if we don't even know what the shape of the new council looks like. Awarding either very short term contracts or doing temporary in-housing pending a break up of Devon CC could be very costly and ultimately will mean less money for bread and butter services. The effect this has on the Council workforce is again hugely unsettling and if there is long term uncertainty over people's jobs and roles, the more likely it is people will leave both DCC and the District Councils for more secure jobs, and the Councils have to fill those posts with agency staff. Again, more expensive and less money for frontline services.

But for the time being we have a deadline of 21st March to work to and this is what DCC will be doing. I know that talks are being held with other District and Unitary Councils so I hope there will be cooperation and not petty infighting in the coming weeks as we all work on a proposal that will work best for our residents. Hopefully by next month's meeting I'll be in a better position to advise what this new council will potentially look like for us all. The stakes in this are very high — if we get this wrong it will cost us, the residents of Devon, very dearly.

Other Matters:

DCC Budget — The final budget will be agreed by DCC Full Council on Thursday. Despite the loss of the rural services grant, additional income from the second homes council tax has ensured we have a balanced budget and no major service reductions or cuts. There will be an additional £4m going into the Highways Budget, though had the Rural Services Grant not been taken away I think we could have found an extra £10m from the Second Homes Council Tax for Highways. Instead, this funding has had to go into other services to prevent major cutbacks within Adult Social Care or Children's Services. Happy to talk in detail on the budget at the next meeting in March.

*District*

TDC did have 5.18 years of land supply, but due to the Labour government increasing the number of houses each planning authority needs to deliver, they now fall short of the 5 year supply by 192 houses. This means that TDC has to be more lenient with housing applications where as otherwise before it would have refused. Cllr. Elliott also pointed out that recently there had been a spate of break-ins and burglaries in Great Torrington, South Molton and other rural areas.

2) Village Hall / Social Club — None

3) Youth Club — None

4) PCSO/Police Report — According to Donna Gutteridge from Devon and Cornwall Police, PC Harrison is the new Neighbourhood Officer. No new PCSO yet, so although four-weekly Teams meetings are set up, should emergency incidents take place at same time, online meetings may have to be cancelled. Unfortunately, these meetings take place on the same Wednesday evening as Yarnscombe PC meetings.

**Actions taken:** Clerk to verify at what time meetings take place.

5) Playing Field — Fred Turner will from now on charge £28/hour when cutting playing field.

**Actions taken:** None at present.

6) Snow warden — None

#### 25.14 Minutes of Meeting of 22 January 2025

Minutes were approved and signed off as a true record.

#### 25.15 Matters arising from last meeting

Schedule of payment for electronic payments

Cllr. Pengilly had drawn up document to be used for recording of electronic payments. Details of payment will be recorded, two councillors will sign/countersign after councillors have agreed to payment. The intention is that the clerk will initiate an online payment transaction through the bank's website, which will then be passed electronically to two signatories for electronic approval. The reason for this is that it provides a "paper trail" for audit purposes rather than a debit card payment. Once the payment is complete, there should be a one-page PDF document that can be printed and kept with the invoice. The first 100 of these electronic

approval payments per month are free of charge (as are the direct debit payments).

**Actions taken:** None at present.

Disposal of old PC documents stored in Village Hall — Update by Cllrs. Brice and Newberry  
Cllrs. Brice and Newberry will meet next week to sort through documents and make a list of things to be kept or to be destroyed (shredding or burning) in accordance with the draft “Document Retention and Disposal Policy”.

**Actions taken:** Update next month.

Purchase of fireproof storage boxes — To be decided next month

#### 25.16 New Matters

Update on new Yarnscombe website

The whole process of creating new website took between 12 and 15 months. Sharron Newberry talked us through the layout of the website; once website is live there will be new pictures on website. The setting up of the “Links” page is still in progress; it will provide information for utilities companies and important contacts within parish. Sharron will also upload Transparency Code and install Agenda/Minutes search function. Website should go live first week of May. Sharron will take up-to-date pictures of councillors/clerk next month to post on website.

**Actions taken:** None at present.

Register of Interests Form — Clerk reminded all councillors to fill in and send off these forms as soon as possible. Forms can be sent via email or post.

**Actions taken:** Cllr. Brice will copy three more forms and circulate to councillors who can't send by email.

#### 25.17 PROW Monthly Report

None

#### 25.18 Planning

None

#### 25.19 Additional Planning

None

#### 25.20 Accounts

Meeting ended at 8.05pm.

11th March 2025