

Minutes of the Meeting of Meare Parish Council
Held on Monday 15th January 2024 7.30pm in the Chapel

Public participation

T James addressed the meeting informing the decision of the Monitoring Officer following a recent allegation made against her. G Tucker responded with a request that Ms James provides further information in defence of the allegation.

Present: Cllrs Bennetts (Chair), Field, C Foster, T Foster, Gage, Hoskins, James, Neale, Richards, Winters, Wren.

In attendance: Parish Clerk – Gerard Tucker.
Cllr Shearer – Somerset Council
+ seven members the public.

111. Apologies for absence. (LGA 1972 s85 (1))

Apologies were received from Cllr Wyke who was attending training

112. Minutes of the meeting held on: Monday 20th November 2023 (LGA 1972 para 41(1))

The minutes of the previous meeting were uncontested and were approved by majority of those present at the previous meeting. They were duly signed as a true and correct record of the meeting by the chair.

The Clerk raised a point of order: In the Monitoring Officers report received, it was stated that the draft minutes were incorrect, yet with all present, have now been approved, uncontested by the Council. He is to seek clarification from the Monitoring Officer on how best to proceed as a conflict of information recorded has arisen. Cllr Shearer informed that as she was present at the November meeting of the Council, she felt best placed to engage directly with the Monitoring Officer and seek clarification.

113. Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest

114. Summary of actions from the previous meeting

- Submit forms to Barclays Bank to regain access to funds. Cllr Bennetts and the previous clerk Sheila Brown have visited a branch of Barclays Bank in an attempt to resolve this issue.
- Cllr Richards to identify an appropriate site for the notice board at the Church Hall and to arrange installation. - Completed
- Clerk to write to Malcolm Sweet. - Completed
- Clerk to write to Festive Lizards and explain the situation with the two defibrillators. This had inadvertently been overlooked.
- Clerk to write to Alison Whitcombe and thank her and her team for maintaining the play area. - Completed

115. County Councillor report

Cllr Shearer informed that there were continued financial pressures, particularly the preparation of a balanced budget. A request has been put before government requesting an additional 5% rise in the precept. The authority's reserves will meet some of the shortfall and continued prudence and efficiency savings will also contribute. Commercial investments and surplus property sales are being considered, although unlikely to make a difference to this year's budget. Items that may impact locally include the pending closure of recycling centres, highways maintenance and the maintenance of closed churchyards.

A discussion on devolved responsibilities and items that may be considered by Meare Parish Council followed.

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The following services currently provided by Somerset Council were considered appropriate for Meare Parish Council to take responsibility for:

- Maintenance of St Mary's Churchyard
- Taking financial responsibility for litter bin emptying
- Additional footpaths and open spaces maintenance.
- The few verges we don't already maintain [and hedge cutting] was also discussed

116. Highways

A concern of a poorly maintained ditch near Downs House, Glastonbury Road is considered to be contributing to the water retention on the road. The Clerk was asked to write to Messers Hecks and Francis and ask if they would maintain the ditch to resolve the problem.

Action: Clerk to write to Messers Hecks and Francis

The Clerk has established that the two posts at Porters Hatch are surplus and will be removed.

A concern was raised about the state of Shapwick Road near Avalon Marshes Centre. The Clerk is to contact the Highways Authority to report the uneven road.

Action: Clerk to contact Highways to report the dangerous surface on Shapwick Road.

The damaged Burtle Rd sign has been reported with Street Scene. To keep costs to a minimum, retrieval of the old sign would possibly prevent the need to have another sign made.

Action: Cllr Field to retrieve the Burtle Road sign

Cllr Winters reported that the sign informing of the presence of a defibrillator is hidden by an overgrown hedge. Cllr James volunteered to either clear the hedge or speak with the owner of the hedge to get the problem resolved. Cllr Gage offered to paint the Defib signs in a bright colour so that they are more obvious to anyone looking for a defibrillator

Action: Cllr James to oversee the clearing of foliage

Action: Cllr Gage to paint the defibrillator sign

117. Car parking charges – Westhay Moor. Following the recently introduced car parking charges at Westhay Moor reserve, a number of residents have raised concerns, including local farmers, worried that this will encourage visitors to park in their gateways, blocking access. The council concluded that they should have been consulted before the decision was implemented. It was unanimously **AGREED** that the clerk is to contact the Somerset Wildlife Trust and invite them to attend the next meeting of the council to explain the decisions taken. 11-0-0

Action: Clerk to invite Somerset Wildlife Trust to the next meeting.

118. Parish Matters including:

a. Playing Field update

i. To report any progress on the removal of soil

Cllr Gage has obtained a verbal quote for the removal of the soil, which is based on the number of loads to be removed. Cllr Hoskins is to obtain an additional quote and report to the next meeting.

Action: Cllr Hoskins to obtain an additional quote for soil removal.

ii. Parish survey – presentation of results

1. Parish magazine
2. Village Hall
3. Housing needs

The clerk presented a summary of the survey returns. A response of almost 40% was considered very good. The key findings are to be included in an article for a future edition of the parish magazine

Action: Clerk to submit an article to the Parish Magazine

Shaun Davis contributed towards the distribution costs of the survey. Council unanimously **AGREED** that Shaun Davis should receive a copy of the responses

Action: Clerk to inform Shaun Davis of response to Housing Needs survey

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b. Village Hall – to include:

- i. Amount of contribution towards Children’s Christmas party. At the November meeting of the council, a maximum contribution of £500 was agreed to support the children’s Christmas party. The actual amount required was £265.76. Cllr Bennetts proposed, seconded by Cllr C Foster and unanimously **AGREED** that this contribution be honoured. 11-0-0

119. NJC pay award – clerks salary

The clerk informed that the NJC pay award for local authority employees has been approved. This is to be back dated to April 2023. The gross award is £1,925 per full-time employee per annum. This equates to £781.41 for the Meare Parish Clerk. Proposed by Cllr Bennetts, seconded by Cllr T Foster and unanimously **AGREED** that the revised pay rise be implemented. 11-0-0

120. Finances a. Presentation of income and expenditure to include:

Payments made since the last meeting

1 st December	G Tucker – Salary (Nov)	£861.50
7 th December	M Sweet – Maintenance (Dec)	£500.00
18 th December	Ripple Accounts – payroll	£ 10.00
18 th December	EDF Energy – electricity	£ 41.81
1 st January	G Tucker – Salary (Dec)	£861.50

Payments to be approved and paid

15 th January	Gerard Tucker – clerks expenses	£367.00
15 th January	M Sweet – Maintenance (Jan)	£500.00
15 th January	Caroline Sanderson 2 x magazine edits	£300.00
15 th January	Meare Community Church 3 x hall hire	£ 90.00

Receipts since the last meeting

3 rd January	Shaun Davis – Survey postage	£465.00
11 th January	Allotment rent	£200.00

The account has reconciled to December 31st and is showing there to be £38,434.38 available in the Co-operative current account. Other accounts remain the same – Barclays Community Account £15,841.70. Co-Operative Business Select £221,707.41

121. To finalise the budget for 2024/25 – to include:

- a. To consider budgeting for temporary toilets. A request had been submitted by Mr Bradley asking the Parish Council to consider installing temporary toilets at the playing field. The discussion concluded that at this time, the additional cost would be too great.

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However, the council did offer to consider supporting individual events with toilet hire costs as they arose.

b. Replacing depleted reserves in specific areas e.g. Playing Field. The draft budget was amended in a number of areas. It was considered that whilst funds were being made available for additional service provision – e.g. churchyard maintenance, litter bin emptying etc, it may not be required. A sum of £3,000 has been included for the playing field. The finalised budget was proposed by Cllr T Foster and seconded by Cllr Neale. 10-0-1

122. To agree the precept for 2024/25

Cllr T Foster proposed seconded by Cllr Bennetts and **AGREED** by majority that a precept of £57,000 is submitted to Somerset Council 10-0-1

123. Correspondence

No additional items of correspondence were raised, other than those already circulated

124. Actions arising from this meeting

- The Clerk to write Messers Hecks and Francis regarding ditch maintenance.
- The Clerk to inform Highways of the poor road surface on Shapwick Road
- Cllr Field to retrieve the Burtle Road sign
- Cllr James to oversee the clearing of foliage near the defibrillator
- Cllr Gage to investigate painting the signs so they are more visible
- The Clerk to invite Somerset Wildlife Trust to the next meeting
- Cllr Hoskins to obtain an additional soil clearance quote
- The Clerk to submit a summary of the survey to the Parish Magazine editor
- The Clerk to inform Shaun Davis of the outcome of the Housing Needs Survey

125. Next meeting will be on Monday 19th February 2024, 7.30pm in the Chapel

The meeting was declared closed at 9.50pm.

