

# **FORTON PARISH COUNCIL**

## **MINUTES OF MEETING**

held in Forton Parish Rooms at 7:00 p.m.

on Wednesday 23 November 2022

**1 PRESENT:**  
**Councillors:** Steve Spencer (Chair), David Carver RFO, Peter Hammond, Angus Hawkins, Zena Young

**Borough Councillors:** Patrick Farrington, Mike Smith

**County Councillor:** Mark Winnington

**Clerk:** Carol Little

**2 Apologies for Absence:**  
Cllr Baynton and Cllr Thomas submitted apologies to the clerk which were accepted.

**3 Declaration of Councillors' Personal Interests:**  
Councillor Hawkins declared an interest in the planning application for Meretown Cottage in item 8

**4 Minutes of Meeting 20 July 2022 & Matters Arising not on this Agenda:**  
Minutes were accepted and signed by the chairman without amendment.

**5 Financial Report; Authority for Payments & Budget**

**5.1 Financial Statement 2021/2022 Quarter 3**

The financial statement dated 02 November 2022 was presented to the meeting. It balanced to the latest bank statements: -

Current Account @ 04 November 2022	£110.00
Reserve Account @ 04 November 2022	£1401.72
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>£1511.72</b>

The statement was approved by the meeting and signed by the chairman.

A forecast to the year's end was presented to the meeting. It forecast a closing precept balance of £879.22. This statement was approved by the meeting and signed by the chairman.

**5.2 Authority for Payments**

Precept Payments	Budget £ p	Agreed to Pay
Clerk's Salary – 3rd quarter *(net)	£90.95	90.95
PAYE	£22.80	22.80
Clerk's Expenses – 3rd quarter	15.00	nil

The Clerk's gross salary is £113.75; PAYE was determined by the payroll service.

The council approved the above payments

**ACTION: RFO**

# FORTON PARISH COUNCIL Meeting Minutes

## 5.3 Budget 2023/2024

The draft budget for next year was presented to the meeting. It was based on the forecast to the year's end which indicated a precept balance brought forward of £879.22. The draft budget required a precept of £1,229.65 (£593.00 + £593.00 + Council Tax Support Grant of £43.65).

Year	Annual Precept £ p
2023-2024	1,229.65
2022-2023	1,045.46
2021-2022	1,110.83
2020-2021	1,072.27
2019-2020	976.00

Inflation is particularly high at present, the Consumer Prices Index (CPI – All items) in October 2022 stood at +10.1%. The RFO took the view that most organisations the council uses will try to hold increases closer to 5%, so it is 5% that is generally applied in the draft budget.

For the clerk's salary the same 5% has been added to the salary but also a 3% bonus to help compensate for the current high inflation. This bonus is only for 2023-24 and being a bonus it is an increase that will not be carried forward.

The general contingency has been raised from 15% to 20% of planned expenditure (£301.00). The reserve is maintained at £300.00.

There is one significant new item; £300 for councillor training. This was proposed by the Chairman to offer specific training particularly to newer councillors to help them become more effective, sooner. Training courses are offered throughout the year by SPCA. Some of this additional expense is offset by the large savings realised on insurance last year and which is expected to continue going forward.

It was pointed out that the noticeboards are continuing to deteriorate and repairs and/or replacement will soon be required. The RFO pointed out that our reserve allowed for some such expenditure.

Stafford Borough Council has just announced that its concurrent grant will remain the same as the previous several years, £270 (2 x £135). The council authorised the RFO to ask SBC for this maximum concurrent grant.

The council debated the draft budget, make no amendments and unanimously approved it. The chairman then signed a copy. The RFO was authorised to issue the draft budget as having being approved.

**ACTION: RFO**

## 5.4 Concurrent Grants

The council was reminded that any Concurrent Grants for the current year should be made by 31 March 2023 or be at risk of being forfeit back to

# FORTON PARISH COUNCIL Meeting Minutes

Stafford Borough Council. The council would encourage applications for consideration at the next meeting on 15th March 2023.

Stafford Borough Councillors present clarified the status of Concurrent funds saying that they may be legitimately used by the Parish Council itself for example for carrying out works in the Parish such as grass cutting or notice board repairs.

## **5.5 Banking**

The RFO reported that he now has an app for the NatWest bank accounts which appears to be working well. NatWest has also just said that it may offer dual authority payments via the app. This would mean that the council may be able reduce its use of cheques in the foreseeable future. The RFO would investigate and report back in due course.

## **6 Nomination of a Trustee to Forton Charities**

Cllr Hammond advised that the term of the trustee previously nominated by the parish council, Karen Greenwood, had come to an end. Cllr Hammond explained there were additional vacancies should anyone be interested and that Karen Greenwood would be happy to continue as a trustee should she be nominated. Cllr Spencer proposed that Karen be re-appointed, and this was unanimously agreed.

## **7 Update on A519 safer road campaign**

The ongoing concerns regarding the safety, state of repair of the stretch of road between Forton and Sutton, the disintegrating overgrown path and the proposal to reduce the speed limit to 30mph were discussed at length. In addition, the parish councillors requested to view accident data and the records from the last speed camera exercise. It was further noted that the collapse of the bridge in Shay Lane had led to increased traffic on the A519. The clerk had been in touch with Diane Firkin (Highways Liaison Officer), and Mark Keeling (Community Infrastructure Manager) since the last meeting and had suggested that a meeting on site take place. Cllr Winnington agreed that this would be a good course of action and said that he would also attend. Several councillors indicated they would also like to be present. Clerk agreed to arrange a meeting to discuss all issues.

**ACTION: CLERK**

## **8 Matters requiring attention in the Parish**

Councillors expressed concern about the debris and leaves blocking the gutters and drains in Forton. They also stated there had been no evidence of the gullies in the parish being emptied for several years although they believed they were on a rolling programme. It was also noted that a road sign opposite Forton Cricket Club had been flattened to the ground this week. Clerk agreed to raise incidents for all.

**ACTION: CLERK**

## **9 Correspondence – Planning applications**

# FORTON PARISH COUNCIL Meeting Minutes

- 9.1 Meretown Cottage 22/36633/COU - To create domestic vehicle access**  
This was discussed at length, it was unanimously agreed that as long as the wall is dismantled correctly and the finish of the gates is in keeping with the local vernacular, this would be a very good compromise of the previous application and the conservation officer's suggestion. The application was supported by the council and the clerk was asked to confirm this to SBC.

**ACTION: CLERK**

- 9.2 Clay Croft, Lower Sutton 22/36208/HOU - To build 2 storey extension**  
Not all councillors had had time to view this as it was only distributed the day before the meeting. It was generally felt that the planning authority would be best placed to deal with this large extension and the clerk would respond to that effect. The clerk advised that should any comments be sent to her in the next few days she would circulate them for approval before responding to planners.

**ACTION: CLERK**

- 9.3 Netherfield House 22/36179/HOU - To create a wildlife swimming pool**  
There were no comments raised regarding this proposal.

**ACTION: CLERK**

## **10 Any other business**

### **10.1 Parking outside Forton nursery**

As Parish council meetings are held in the same building all councillors were familiar with the difficulties faced by the residents and nursery staff and clients. Councillors were clear however that this was a matter for the PSCO (Police Community Support Officers). The clerk agreed to advise the complainant to request assistance from them

**ACTION: CLERK**

- 10.2** Cllr Farrington, leader of the council asked for a few moments to speak about the current pressures and failings of the planning department. He explained that COVID initially slowed down the process because of the inability to have meetings and consultations. However, since then the staff losses have been significant, people who the council trained have moved on to more lucrative positions as soon as they have qualified despite a pay review to address this.

Due to the lack of staff, experience and a backlog of work, the council are dealing with a lot of complaints which also slows down the process. Cllr Farrington went on to give assurances that everything possible was being done to rectify the situation including exploring a possible amalgamation with Cannock Chase Council.

Meeting Closed at 8:27 p.m.

## **11 Date of Next Meetings**

**11.1** Wednesday 15 March 2023

**11.2** Wednesday 10 May 2023 (starting with the Annual Meeting)