

**ALVERDISCOTT AND HUNTSHAW PARISH COUNCIL**

**MINUTES OF THE PARISH COUNCIL MEETING HELD**

**WED.13<sup>th</sup> July 2022 7.30pm IN ALVERDISCOTT VILLAGE HALL**

**Present:** Cllrs.White (Chair), Ley, Easterbook, Hardwicke, County Councillor L.Hellyer,Dist.Cllr.Lock.

One member of the public.

In attendance: Parish clerk M.James.

**Apologies** Cllr Huxtable

**20. Questions from the public:** Attendees are reminded that the time allowed for each member of the public is 3 minutes and the total time allowed is 15 minutes.

H Bolton read out the statement below:

The following email was sent from Councillor Jean Huxtable to Parish Clerk Yvonne Templeman on 27th April this year:

“No worries. Have to get bank signatories changed soon as can. Only thing can suggest is ask Graham or Bernard to sign n see if it goes through? Ask them discreetly not in front of likes of Helen Bolton. Could try it on yours first but don't pay it in on line possibly not through the wall? Take it into Bank. I had one rejected paying in on line but no problem when took it into bank. Think more checks must get done if on line? If it is rejected you could always say didn't realise must have used wrong councillor? None of them are the ones recorded. I can't do it as I have statements sent to me. Jean”

Frankly I was absolutely horrified when I read this; the Council is renowned for refusing to follow protocols but this was in a different league:

“NONE OF THEM ARE THE ONES RECORDED” Councillor Huxtable was clearly fully aware that the people she asked to sign cheques were not legally registered signatories. I shouldn't need to comment on how serious this is, especially when public money is involved. She also suggests that the NEW clerk should do likewise, thereby perpetrating a deliberately fraudulent practice and implicating unwitting councillors as well.

“ASK THEM DISCREETLY NOT IN FRONT OF LIKES OF HELEN BOLTON” If by “the likes of Helen Bolton” she means a ‘member of the public’ this is indeed damning. Parish Councillors must be “open and transparent” in everything they do; if, as the remark suggests, she did not want the public to know what she had been up to this is a clear acknowledgement that she knew this would NOT stand up to scrutiny and she wanted it to remain hidden. If there is a different reason my name has been used perhaps Councillor Huxtable will enlighten me.

“I HAD ONE REJECTED PAYING IT IN ON LINE” Councillor Huxtable has previously denied, publicly at a parish meeting, that she had ever had a cheque rejected. This should be in previous minutes. She even provided an excuse for the clerk to use if she was “caught out” when committing her crime.

“THINK MORE CHECKS MUST GET DONE IF ON LINE” This directly counteracts statements

previously made by Chairman White when he says the bank has no record of signatories. If they had no records how could they have recognised that the ones on the cheque were not acceptable?

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Acting as “Responsible Financial Officer” was a major part of Councillor Huxtable’s role during the 25 years she was parish clerk. She therefore has to accept full responsibility for the mess the bank account was in; even if the bank made mistakes it was her responsibility to get it sorted out, her responsibility to ensure that retiring or deceased signatories were replaced immediately. Her personal responsibility. Not the bank’s. **HERS.**

The Parish Councillor were also at fault. They were her employers and she should have been supervised to ensure that she was properly fulfilling her responsibilities, which she clearly was not. However, she was a co-opted Parish Councillor when she sent the email.

I am very disappointed with the way this email was dealt with by Chairman White. Instead of making it public and dealing with any backlash he allowed it to remain “hidden”, clearly to protect Councillor Huxtable. As a direct result the parish clerk resigned; she had sought advice and had confirmation that this was fraud, and coercion to commit fraud and was told she definitely should not go along with it. Any honest person would have done the same thing.

There are “seven principles of public life” which should apply to all Parish Councillors. They are:

**SELFLESSNESS**

**INTEGRITY** - “. . . being honest and having strong moral principles”.

**OBJECTIVITY**

**ACCOUNTABILITY** - “. . . they must submit themselves to scrutiny to ensure this”

**OPENESS** - “ Information should not be withheld from the public unless there are clear and **LAWFUL** reasons for doing so”.

**HONESTY** - telling the truth at **ALL** times

**LEADERSHIP**

I think I have very good reason to question if these criteria are being met by current Councillors.

**Statement from Mr Goldstone read out by parish council chairman Graham White on Wednesday 13th July 2022.**

I would like to thank the chairman for his efforts in fulfilling the freedom of information requests I previously submitted. However, satisfactory responses to two of these requests were not provided. The chairman’s response was that “the documents have become a closed book.”

I pointed out that the AGAR documentation retention policy requires local authorities to keep documents on file for 5 years and must make them available to the public upon request. I have not been provided with any further information.

I must therefore make the following serious allegations, based on the information available to me:

That councillors Hardwicke and Huxtable have made false, fraudulent claims in response to items 4 and 5 on the annual governance statement for the year 2020/2021.

That historically, Mrs Huxtable, in her role as the parish clerk, has facilitated the submission of false, fraudulent declarations via the AGAR process. Councillor Huxtable's casual attitude toward committing fraud has been demonstrated in the email sent from her to the previous parish clerk, Mrs Templeman, on February 7th 2022.

I would therefore like to request the council publishes, from the website, all AGAR related documentation for the previous 5 years, going back to 2017/2018. This would go some way toward restoring trust in the parish council, which is currently extremely low thanks to repeated AGAR related fines and failings.

The Accounts and Audit Regulations 2015 make it clear that authorities that have websites must use them to make documentation available to the public.

**Discussion during the meeting:**

Cllr Easterbook said that they had been signing cheques in the past and never had any problems or had any returned. In reply the Chair said that the email had not been hidden and that Mrs Templeman had written to say about it the email, and the fact that a cheque had been rejected was due to the fact that the bank account was not online enabled. H. Bolton said that if Cllr Huxtable had stood up and been honest and admitted that she had messed up but instead lies have been told. The Chair also said that the bank themselves had told Cllr Huxtable to continue as she was. A member of the public agreed with what Mr Goldstone had said in his letter. H. Bolton asked if the insurance company had been notified and the Chair agreed to follow this up. The Chair has done a brief reply to Mr Goldstone to say that it is not fraud as such but irregular practices through possibly no fault of Cllrs.

**21. Minutes of previous meeting**

Cllrs said that they had not received a copy of the Minutes. It was agreed that the Chair would distribute hard copies to the Cllrs after each meeting. Approval of Minutes moved to the next meeting.

**22. Matters arising not dealt with in Minutes**

The Chair reported that we now have a bank account. The welcome pack should be arriving soon followed by bank cards and cheque book. Torridge council have been notified.

**23. Update of Councillors' Declarations of Interest**

Cllrs were handed a form to fill out for Declaration of Interest and Chair awaits their return.

**24. Adoption of revised Standing Orders**

In the query to the correction to the Standing Orders, the Chair said that these are the National Standing Orders, tweaked for Alverdiscott & Huntshaw Parish Council with regards to dates of meetings being 2<sup>nd</sup> Wednesday of every other month. The most relevant part of the Standing orders is that all comments to come via the Chair without exception and wait until requested to do so before speaking. Also, that members of the public are allowed the standard 3 minutes

of the time to make their point, with maximum of 15 minutes. The Chair asked if there were any queries or objections to Standing Orders. Cllrs gave approval of the Standing Orders.

## **25. Adoption of Financial Procedures**

Similarly, the Financial Procedures are based on the National Model and the Chair had also circulated copies of these to the Cllrs. These include approval of payments prior to them being made, especially relevant as will now be doing online payments. The Chair will be presenting the Cllrs with a list of due payments and the Cllrs will then approve etc for payments to be made via cheque or online. This will cover the AGAR requirements.

It was noted that the 2021-22 accounts had been completed by our internal auditor and sent to Littlejohns 2 months ago, they only confirmed receipt yesterday.

Cllrs gave approval of the Financial Procedures to be adopted.

## **26. County Councillor's report**

**Report for Alverdiscott and Huntshaw Parish Council from County Cllr. Linda Hellyer  
July 2022**

During the summer, any white lines/words on the highways within the parish will be repainted, if necessary

My time is busy with the various committees at DCC, the busiest of which are Childrens' scrutiny and Health and Adult care scrutiny. I am on a task group looking at SEND (Special educational needs and disabilities) and one looking at how to reduce Ambulance waiting times.

Demand for services is higher than ever before, set against a background of rising prices and market shortages. This trend of rising demand pressure and rising prices is likely to continue into 2023, which will create a challenging financial environment going forward.

I recently had a meeting with the Head of Highways. Highways schemes are usually programmed 12-18 months ahead. However, the way things are now, Highways know what work they are doing for the next 3 months, and they know what the hope to do for the following 3 months, but after that, nothing is certain anymore.

The highest costs to the authority are the statutory duties of looking after vulnerable children and vulnerable adults of working age.

Since I met with the Head of Highways DCC has said that it has a £30million "black hole" in the budget at the end of Month 2 of the current financial year. This looks set to rise to £40million, and this is apart for the deficit that we have for our high needs childrens budget.

I am told that the costs for our Highways works have gone up 30% and schools transport is another area with a huge hike in costs.

All the departments have been asked to look to see where they can save money. Obviously all the "low hanging fruit" in savings has been made during the years of austerity. I have had

some of my road schemes that were due to happen next month cancelled.

Having said that, I do have some funds in my locality grant that I have kept back for the 2 parishes if you have any projects e.g., for your village halls? I have £500 that I can give to each parish e.g.; you may want to buy a defibrillator? Email me with details of your project asap.

OFSTED visited DCC in 2018 and found that some childrens' services required improvement. This was to do with care leaver's accommodation. They have recently revisited, and despite a new management structure and many positive changes, they say that the improvements are not enough.

Dcc is struggling to fill vacancies e.g for Childrens social workers because of the housing crisis. Dcc is looking at buying or leasing accommodation for new starters.

Routine matters such as potholes, overgrown vegetation, blocked drains and gullies, streetlights, damage to signs, damaged manhole covers etc can be reported via the Devon County Council website Google Devon County council report a problem and a page will come up with icons e.g., potholes. Click on the icon and follow the simple instructions.

Alternatively, you can telephone the customer care team. 0345 155 1015

For Highways telephone 0345 155 1004

Out of Hours highways EMERGENCIES ONLY 01392 380 380 or 0345 155 1008

In the event of flooding the control room number is 01392 383329

Mud or Slurry on the roads and Speeding are Police matters.

You can email 101 from a smart phone, or telephone 101

You may find it quicker to go onto the Devon and Cornwall Police website and use the Live chat facility.

There is also the option to email your local police team.

I am always happy for residents to contact me.

Telephone 07828758360 Email:- [linda.hellyer@devon.gov.uk](mailto:linda.hellyer@devon.gov.uk)

In 2018 Ofsted did an inspection of our Children's services and found that some children in our care were living on the street. Since then, we have been on an improvement journey ie taking on new staff and have over 100 vacancies. One of the things that make it difficult to recruit is staff finding accommodation so the council is looking to find accommodation.

**Discussion:**

The Chair asked if the grant could be clarified. Could it be diverted to the Church? Only for the upkeep of the Churchyard. It was suggested to ask if it could be used for the bells as in some cases it has been used for this at other Parishes. One of the Cllrs agreed to email Cllr Hellyer regarding this.

## 27. District Councillor's report

There is a £150 rebate for council tax for anyone in band A to D. This will automatically come through if pay by Direct Debit.

Dist Cllr Lock asked Chair to put co-option and new Cllrs on the Agenda.

## 28. Outstanding payments

The Chair said that some of the outstanding payments had been settled by him due to the time critical nature, and were therefore due for reimbursement.

### Outstanding:

G D White	Gallagher Insurance 2022-23 Paid on behalf of A&HPC now due to Mr White	526.76
G D White	Devon Association of Local Councils Paid on behalf of A&HPC now due to Mr White	67.59
PKF Littlejohn	Limited assurance review & additional charges	576.00
DALC	Affiliation fee 2022-23	99.62
Y Templeman	Parish clerk wages 10/11/21-10/02/22 & expenses	501.58
Local Rag	2022 grant	320.00
All Saints Church	2022 grant	350.00
Alverdiscott Hall	2022 grant	300.00
Huntshaw Hall	2022 grant	300.00
Huntshaw PCC	2022 grant	350.00
	Total	3391.55

The Chair gave the Cllrs the list of due payments which they signed and approved.

The Account should be live from 8<sup>th</sup> July. Signatories on the new account: Cllr White, Ley and Hardwicke. Any 2 to sign and any 1 to do an online payment after the paperwork is signed.

## 29. Planning Applications

1/0094/2022/FUL	Alverdiscott	Baxter Extension to Moorlands	7.2.22	
1/0116/2022/CPE	Alverdiscott	Saxon Old School House	7.2.22	
1/0357/2022/FUL	Alverdiscott	Thompson Barn conversion	11.4.22	No objection
1/1057/2021/FUL	Webbery Barton	Ford/Moore Solar farm	19.4.22	
1/0398/2022/FUL	Stony Cross	May Replace barn with detached houses	20.4.22	

Objecting

1/1162/2021/FUL	Huntshaw	Cawsey Barn conversion - Haddacott Farm	29.4.22
1/0305/2022/FUL	Alverdiscott	Chapple Convert outbuilding to holiday accommodation	25.5.22
1/0656/2022/FUL	Huntshaw	Winterborn	Convert 2nd storey garage to holiday unit
29.6.22	No objection		
1/0657/2022/LBC	Huntshaw	Winterborn	Convert 2nd storey garage to holiday unit
29.6.22	No objection		

**30. Correspondence**

The Chair had read out the email from Mr Goldstone. There was no other correspondence.

**31. Other Items at the Chair's discretion**

Thanks to Mr Faulconbridge who had cleared the vegetation and put a coat of paint on the bus shelter out of the kindness of his heart.

The Chair said that the defibrillator outside the village hall and the box is disintegrating for the second time. It had been suggested by the Village Hall Committee to move the old phone box to the village hall to house the defibrillator. We would not need planning permission to do this. At the same time as doing that, we would replace the existing defibrillator with new housing of which costs either £750 or £125. Views were requested: there is the point that the location of the phone box at the moment leads it to be neglected. It would protect the case. There are a number of communities across the country that use a phone box to house the defibrillator. It was questioned why move the phone box? The phone box could disintegrate if it was moved. Richard Oaten is the person to advise on the defibrillator. Could also use the grant for a new defibrillator.

Member of the public raised the Solar Farm matter where one of the applicants had wanted to meet with the Chair regarding distribution of grant funds and asked if they had met as yet? The Chair said they had not met. Once the project is started, then the Chair will talk to them.

**32. Dates of next meeting**

Wed. 14<sup>th</sup> September 7.30pm Huntshaw village hall. Cllr Hellyer sent apologies.

The Chairman thanked those present for their attendance and closed the meeting at 8.45pm

Signed.....Chairman.....dated