

Minutes of the Extraordinary meeting of Shepton Montague Parish Council held on Wednesday 30th October 2024 at 7:00pm in the village hall.

Present:

Cllrs John Sykes (Chair - JBS), Paul Williams (PW), Julia Hunter (JH),
Ali Willasey-Wilsey (AW-W)

Members of Public:

5

Meeting started at 7pm

1) Open discussion

Sarah Maude has almost established a full team list, involving surrounding parishes to maintain an overview on all local planning applications. Parish clerks will be involved in the communication once the list has been finalised.

Somerset Planning department backlog was discussed as it appears that due to delays, people are going ahead with development as there is no response. It was suggested that contact should be made with the local MP about this as the current system is broken.

Somerset's "Enhanced Highways Maintenance Scheme" and costs of bin emptying was discussed. Members of public feel it is unfair to expect them to pay for things that have already been paid for within their council tax which have not been maintained. A suggestion was made to involve local parishes to invite further discussion on this. It was suggested that Cllrs Trimnell and Power should be invited to the next meeting and to add this to the agenda.

2) Apologies

None

3) Declarations of interest

There were no declarations of interest.

4) Minutes of last meeting

It was RESOLVED (4-0-0) to accept and approve the minutes of the last meeting dated 13th August 2024

Cllr John Sykes signed the minutes.

5) To formally note the termination of Joe Leach as Parish Clerk (as of 27th September 2024).

Advice has been sought from SALC regarding this process. Attempts have been made to contact Joe, however, to date there has been no response. Witham Friary Parish Council are in the same position and have had no contact from Joe either.

A letter of termination of employment at SM Parish Council has been sent via recorded delivery.

A laptop remains in Joe's possession along with the cheque book and a small amount of paperwork (recent paperwork is digitally recoverable). The cheque book requires 2 signatures, but will be cancelled. The question of any outstanding salary was raised, and it was confirmed that the termination letter advises that payment of salary is currently withheld until property that Joe holds is returned. It was agreed that further legal advice will be sought to clarify the position on salary via SALC and ACAS.

It was also agreed that contact should be made with Witham Friary Parish Council to ensure a consistent approach.

Action JBS

It was RESOLVED (4-0-0) to formally record the termination of Joe Leach's employment as SM Parish Clerk as of 27th September 2024.

6) To appoint Sam Mainstone as the new Parish Clerk and Responsible Financial Officer (commencing 1st November 2024)

The employment contract was circulated prior to the meeting for review.

Sam gave a brief introduction and employment history.

It was RESOLVED to approve the appointment of Sam Mainstone as the new Parish Clerk and Responsible Financial Officer, commencing 1st November 2024.

Sam and Cllr John Sykes (as Chair) signed the employment contract.

7) To co-opt Mervyn Watch¹ as a Parish Councillor (commencing 1st November 2024)

There was an objection raised by a member of public querying the procedure followed for this vacant seat. Although it was felt that correct procedure had taken place, this was during a time when the Parish Clerk position was not maintained, therefore it was agreed to restart this process.

A member of public requested that official communication should be posted onto the website and notice boards, with the unofficial What's App group used for unofficial business only. Cllrs agree with this, and where this might have been the case during the problems with the absent Parish Clerk, this should no longer be a problem.

It was RESOLVED (4-0-0) to restart the co-option process.

The Parish Clerk will notify Mervyn Watch.

Post-meeting note: process for co-option in cases where more than one candidate is available to fill a vacancy was clarified: a simple closed ballot of councillors should take place, the Chair having a deciding vote.

¹ Known as "Fyn"

8) To approve the move of the Shepton Montague website and clerk's email onto a gov.uk domain.

Advice has been sought and a gov.uk domain is considered secure and best practice. There is a one-off cost to set this up with an annual fee. A Microsoft Office licence will be required for the new laptop.

It was RESOLVED (4-0-0) to approve the migration to Microsoft Office with a gov.uk domain.

Action: JBS to arrange

9) Budget/Finance 2024/25 – To approve the purchase of items & services related to agenda items 5 to 8 inclusive.

A summary of the budget was reviewed and additional expenditure approved.

It was RESOLVED (4-0-0) to approve the budget with the additional expenditure items.

The next meeting has been scheduled for Tuesday 12th November, however, this will need to change as Sam has a meeting at Bruton. Options for the new date will be shared and the meeting will be rescheduled in due course.

Meeting closed at 8:15pm