

WESTHAM PARISH COUNCIL

Minutes of the Full Council Meeting held at 7.00pm on Monday,
20 January 2025 at The Amenity Hall, Stone Cross School,
Adur Drive, Stone Cross, BN24 5EF

Present: Cllr D Axell, Cllr L Comfort, Cllr F Durling, Cllr M Fairweather*, Cllr K Farley, Cllr M Hallett, Cllr C Hanson, Cllr B Mayfield, Cllr A Taylor, Cllr D Upton*

(* denotes WDC Councillor)

Also at the meeting: East Sussex Cllr D Shing,

S. Sanders (Clerk)

192. Apologies

Cllr P Baldwin

193. Declarations of Interest

None

194. Questions from members of the public

None

195. Draft Minutes of the Full Council Meeting held on Monday 18 November 2024 to be agreed and confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chair of the Meeting

The Minutes had previously been circulated to Councillors.

The Minutes of the Full Council meeting held on Monday 18 November 2024 were agreed and signed as a correct record by the Chair of the Council

Proposed and Seconded

Unanimous decision

Resolved: That the Minutes of the Full Council Meeting held on 18 November 2024 be agreed and signed by the Chair of the Meeting

196. To receive reports from East Sussex County Councillors and Wealden District Councillors

(i) Cllr Fairweather – Wealden District Council

Cllr Fairweather apologised for not be able to attend some meetings he has to attend other meetings on Monday nights.

He explained about the issue over Council Tax payments that were erroneously taken from some residents bank accounts over Christmas. 17,000 people were affected by the Direct Debit with payments taken before 01 January.

Cllr Fairweather asked Councillors to ensure that if they know anyone who had been affected to direct them to the Wealden DC website.

(ii) Local Government reorganisation (White Paper)– Wealden DC only heard about this the week before Christmas. The White Paper published included the abolishment of District and Borough Councils.

The dates for consultation were very tight but West Sussex, East Sussex, Brighton and Hove had met to discuss the idea of one large authority. These councils had agreed to having one large authority and submitted to government their proposals. More consultations will take place soon. The 31 January is the date that the government must notify councils of any decision because of the County Council elections to be held in May 2025. All news of developments would be passed on to the Councils as soon as they are available.

The Constitutional Review which would bring in changes to district boundaries was to have started in January this year but this will now be put on hold until more information regarding Local Council reorganisation is given by the government.

(iii) Cllr Shing - East Sussex County Council

Cllr Shing talked about the above White Paper and what the consequences would be for the County Council.

East Sussex Council had met with West Sussex Council and Brighton and Hove Council and agreed to apply to government for devolved status. This was agreed and proposals made to government before the cutoff date earlier this month.

Devolution proposals included which functions would be run by the new authority.

A further meeting has been held with the majority of the debate considering whether the local elections in May should be postponed. A further meeting will be held with all ESCC Councillors when there is more information from the government.

Cllr Shing had no information at this time as to what the role of town and parish councils be in the new authority.

Cllr Shing said the government would let all Councils know by March this year if they have been successful in their application to be a new authority.

Elections to the new authority could be in either 2026 or 2027.

(iv) He then spoke of an important public survey on Rights of Way that had been launched. This survey would have an impact on Rights of Way in the future and everyone was urged to fill in the survey. The closing date is 14 March 2025.

(v) ESCC budget proposals would be taken to Cabinet on the 28 January 2025 where how to deliver services with major savings would be discussed. The draft budget would then be discussed by the full ESCC Council on 11 February 2025.

There would probably be an increase of £1.70 per week on a Band D property.

197. To agree the Draft Budget and Precept for the year 2025/26

Councillors were supplied with the Detailed Income and Expenditure by Budget Heading and the Precept 2025/26 requirement showing increases between 3% to 20%.

It was explained to Councillors that there would have to be an increase due to costs incurred for carrying out grass cutting, tree work, hedge work and lighting maintenance. The increased costs the Council faced were passed on from using outside service providers.

The Council endeavour to make savings where ever possible while carrying out work in the parish.

The Chair of the Finance Committee explained to Councillors that the Precept for the Financial Year 2025/26 should rise by 10% to mitigate inflation rises. The Precept for this Financial Year 2024/25 is £168,177.

For the last two years the Precept has risen within inflation but with maintenance costs rising a slightly larger increase was needed

A rise of was 10% recommended to Councillors. This would mean an increase in the Precept for 2025/26 of £16,817.70 totalling a Precept requirement of £184,994.70.

This amount was then recommended in Councillors

Proposed and seconded

Unanimous decision

Resolved: Agreed that an increase of 10% to the Precept for 2025/26 totalling £184,994.70 (this will be rounded up to £184,995)

198. Financial Items recommended for approval

(i) Reconciliation Reports for October 2024 for approval and resolution

The reconciliation reports were agreed by Council and signed by the Chair of the Council.

That the Payment List of £20,583.08 for October 2024 is approved

Proposed and seconded

Unanimous agreement

Resolved: That the reconciliation reports for October 2024 are agreed and signed by the Chair of the Council

(ii) Bank Statements October 2024 to be approved

The bank statements were approved by Council and signed by the Chair of the Council

Proposed and seconded

Unanimous agreement

Resolved: That the bank statements for October 2024 are agreed and signed by the Chair of the Council

(iii) Reconciliation Reports for November 2024 for approval and resolution

The reconciliation reports were agreed by Council and signed by the Chair of the Council

That the Payment List of £20,099.39 for November 2024 is approved

Proposed and seconded

Unanimous agreement

Resolved: That the reconciliation reports for November 2024 are agreed and signed by the Chair of the Council

(iv) Bank Statements November 2024 to be approved

The bank statements were approved by Council and signed by the Chair of the Council

Proposed and seconded

Unanimous agreement

Resolved: That the bank statements for November 2024 are agreed and signed by the Chair of the Council

199. Readoption of the Annual Financial Risk Assessment 2024/25

The Annual Financial Risk Assessment 2024/25 was approved. One Councillor commented that Councillors should be aware that section 17 of the document states, “Councillors are not allowed to contact directly potential new contractors; this must be completed via the Clerk”

Proposed and seconded

Unanimous agreement

Resolved:

That the Annual Financial Risk Assessment be adopted for 2024/25

200. Anti-Social Behaviour in Westham - an update on crime figures in the Parish for Councillors

A Councillor had been concerned about the rising anti-social behaviour in the Westham area and had asked that this item be put on the January Full Council agenda.

Crime figures have shown an increase in the past year of certain types of crime in the Westham and Stone Cross Parish area and this has concerned Councillors. The figures in certain months may be skewed by one incident but overall the increase was worrying. Clarity in the numbers was needed.

Monthly crime figures would be on the agenda for all forthcoming meetings.

Councillor’s discussed whether it would be a good idea to contact various organisations in the area to have a campaign to make residents aware of reporting crime to the police.

The PCSO for the area would be invited to a future meeting of the Council.

201. Clerks Monthly update for Councillors

(i) Solar Lighting on the Parish Council car park

The contractors had inspected the site for risk assessment which they duly submitted to the Council.

They are hoping to start work in the half term holiday.

Before the work can commence SGN have to be notified of the work that is to be carried out next to a high pressure gas main. This has been done and the Council is awaiting confirmation.

(ii) Cherwell Close Play Area – removal of equipment

A quotation had been obtained for the removal of the play equipment in the area. Certain pieces of equipment that were in good condition could be moved to Hamble Road play area as this play area was frequently used by children.

The cost of removing and re-siting the equipment would be expensive but cheaper than having to buy new equipment.

The Clerk asked that this item be deferred to the February Full Council Meeting so that more information can be sought.

(iii) Wells Estate Allotment site and car park

The Clerk was still waiting for quotations for the trenching of the pipework /troughs to connect to the mains water.

Owing to the festive season break the quotations had not arrived before the January Full Council Meeting. Hopefully quotations will be available for the February Full Council Meeting.

A discussion about the total cost to make the allotment site useable will also be required.

202. To resolve to exclude Members of the Press and Public (Public Bodies [Admission to Meetings] Act 1960

There were no matters to be discussed

The Meeting closed at 20.35pm