

Frithelstock Parish Council

Chair John Burrill 01805 622755

Email chair@frithelstockparish.org

Minutes of the meeting of Frithelstock Parish Council held on Wednesday 20th November 2024 at 7pm in Frithelstock Village Hall.

In attendance Cllrs. John Burrill (Chair) Adrian Hardwick, Chris Stevens, Lizzie Hunkin, Mark Thomas, Bob Lewis-Basson

Also in attendance Devon County Council Councillor, A Saywell, Torridge District Council Councillor, P Pennington, PC Frank Harrison and three members of the public.

1. The Chairman opened the meeting at 7pm

2. Apologies for absence.
None.

3. Declarations of Interest.
None.

4. Reports from outside bodies.

Devon County Council Councillor, A Saywell gave a verbal report largely concerning possible devolution with a written report to follow, see attached.

Torridge District Council Councillor, P Pennington gave a verbal report.

1. Torridge Council were concerned about the increases in NI announced in the Budget and the impact this would have on local businesses.

2. He reported that there was a discretionary fund of £1,000 available across 12 parishes, Cllr. Hunkin to follow up.

3. Torridge DC were against devolution but needed to wait until the proposals were published before commenting further.

4. There are 800 pensioners in Torridge who were eligible for pension credit but had not applied, probably because of the complexity of the application process.

PC Frank Harrison, Neighbourhood Beat Manager, introduced himself and gave out information about a problematic person they wanted to find. Details to be published on the Parish Council web site.

Crimes – 2 violence, 1 criminal damage

Logs – 1 domestic related, 2 nuisance ASB (erratic driving)

5. Minutes.

The minutes, previously circulated, of the meeting held on 18th September 2024 were approved and signed.

6. Matters arising.

None

7. Public Participation.

A member of the public asked if payments made by the Council since the previous meeting could be shown in the minutes. It was agreed that this would be done. See details in 11. below.

8. Appointment of a Parish Clerk

The Chair reported that two applications had been received. Both had extensive accounting experience but no Local Council Clerk experience and were therefore rejected.

9. Planning issues.

One planning application was discussed to which the PC had no objection.

Frithelstock 1/0917/2024/TDC Mr Austin Connor Application for approval of technical details for conversion of existing barn to 1no. dwelling and associated works following grant of permission in principle 1/0109/2022/PIP - Barns at Southcott Frithelstock Devon

10. Devon County Council Pension Fund.

The Chairman reported that as we currently have no active members of the Fund, we need to suspend our membership and to make contributions during the Period of Suspended Participation of the employer Secondary Rate Contributions at a rate of £1.88 per month be paid from 1st November 2023 to date. This contribution is 0.6% of the final pensionable salary of the previous Parish Clerk. This amount may change after 1 April 2026, depending on the results of the 2025 Actuarial Valuation.

11. Payments made since last meeting.

HSBC	Bank Charges	27.00
Devon Assoc. Local Councils	Annual subscription	143.86
Society of Local Clerks	Part annual subscription	31.35
HMRC	Tax on Clerk's salary	277.20
J Burrill	Defib battery	346.80

Future payments approved at this meeting.

Zurich	Insurance premium	593.70
J Burrill	Wreath, defib pads staty.	122.75
R Lewis-Basson	Web site	75.60
Play Inspection Co.	Play equipment inspection Jan.	195.00

12. Banking arrangements.

As all banks now seem to making charges for Parish Council accounts it was resolved to keep the existing accounts with HSBC.

13. Report from the Finance Group.

As requested my members of the public simple accounts of income and expenditure for the three years to April 2024 were presented and will be posted on the web site.
Accounts were presented for the six months to September 2024 and will be posted on the web site.

14. Draft Budget for the Precept Application.

A draft was presented, discussed and agreed that it is held over to the January meeting for final approval prior to submitting our Precept Application which is due shortly after that meeting.

15. Urgent matters raised by Councillors.

Cllr. Hunkin offered to arrange for a Christmas tree to be erected in the usual place. Cllrs. Stevens and Thomas to assist with decorating it and Cllr. Hardwick to contact the residents of the adjacent house to request a power supply.

The meeting closed at 9.00pm.

Date of next meeting, 7pm 15th January 2025.

John Burrill
Chair
Frithelstock Parish Council.

Budget Funding Settlements

Unfortunately, we have had a major curveball from the Government as we prepare next year's budget.

On 28 November 2024, the Government issued a Local Government Finance Policy Statement, providing an update on local government funding following the Chancellor's Autumn Budget in October.

The main headlines for the Authority from last week's Policy Statement are:

- Rural Services Delivery Grant (RSDG) and Services Grant are to be removed and repurposed. In 2024/25 the Authority received £10.1 million in RSDG and £717,000 in Services Grant, both of which will cease in 2025/26.
- A new one-year £600 million Recovery Grant "...will be distributed to places with greater need and demand for services and less ability to raise income locally". The grant is intended to be highly targeted, meaning that not all authorities will receive an allocation. Government will use deprivation as a proxy for greater need and demand for services. It is feasible the Authority will not receive any of this new funding.
- A new Children's Social Care Prevention Grant worth £250 million will be "distributed using a new children's needs-based formula, which will allocate funding according to estimated need for children's social care services". The Policy Statement says this funding will lay the groundwork for children's social care reform, enabling investment in additional prevention

activity through Family Help. It also states that the grant conditions will be set out alongside the final Settlement.

- Social Care Grant – In 2025/26, £5.7 billion will be provided through the Social Care Grant, supporting both adult and children's social care – whilst equalising for the adult social care precept. This is an increase of £680 million compared to 2024/25. It is not clear at this point how much of this increase will be received by DCC and what exactly equalising for the adult social care precept means or what impact it will have.
- The New Homes Bonus (NHB) Grant scheme continues for one more year, with the funding methodology unchanged. The Authority received £1.1 million in 2024/25 and initial estimates indicate this grant will be approximately £1.3 million in 2025/26. Government has advised local authorities to prepare for this to be the final year of NHB with plans to consult on proposals for reforming the funding beyond 2025/26 in due course.
- Council Tax Precept Referendum Thresholds – these remain unchanged for most, with increases for standalone Fire and Rescue Authorities and Police. For social care authorities, like Devon, this is limited to less than 3% general tax rate increase plus 2% for Adult Social Care.

Impact on the Authority's 2025/26 Budget Setting – The actual impact on DCC's funding will not be known until the Provisional Local Government Finance Settlement is announced, anticipated to be in week commencing 16 December. However, based on our best interpretation of the information currently available, coupled with uncertainty around council tax income projections, the Council have prudently revised down our funding assumptions by approximately **£13 million**.

As a consequence, and pending the provisional settlement, further work is underway across the authority to ensure a balanced budget can be set in February. Due to the significant risk to our funding at such a late stage in our budget setting process, the decision has been taken to not set draft targets in December as planned, but to instead take them to the January Cabinet following the Provisional Local Government Finance Settlement. To enable more time to take action the Children's Scrutiny Committee will be moved from 23rd January to 28th January in line with the other Scrutiny Committees.

In terms of what this will then look like for next year's budget, I do not yet know. I *think* at this stage it is more likely that planned investment and funding increases into Highways will have to be moved to cover other budgets... and there may have to be other unpalatable decisions that need to be taken. I am confident we will be able to set a balanced budget but this last minute changing of funding settlements is unprecedented and bluntly, not helpful.

Devolution – As reported at previous Parish/Town Council meetings, work continues on setting up the Combined County Authority and Devolution Settlement. Currently this is on track for a January start.

However, as I also reported at the last meeting, the Government have seemingly reopened the thorny issue of Local Government Reorganisation, linked to future Devolution Deals. At a meeting with South West Council Leaders the Local Government Minister expressed a preference for a Devon and Cornwall Combined Authority Devolution Deal with a Directly Elected Mayor, and Unitary Authorities underneath...

We await the Government's proposed Devolution White Paper... we may or may not be forced into reorganisation. It would be 'brave', or 'courageous' even to use Sir Humphrey Appleby speak for the Government to try and impose a unitary settlement on Devon given that the existing set up with

Team Devon works well, and the political impact this would have on the Governing Party in Exeter and Plymouth.

However, the cynic in me also notes the abrupt funding settlement changes above... and wonders whether there will be more of an attempt to starve Districts and Counties out of existence and move to unitarization through coercion.

This is the update for now, when I have more information, I will let you know. If I don't see you before I wish you all a Happy Christmas. I hope the New Year will bring better news.

Best regards,
Andrew

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Andrew Saywell

**Cabinet Member for Organisational Development, Workforce and Digital Transformation
Devon County Councillor for Torrington Rural
07886 446560**