

FORTON PARISH COUNCIL

Minutes of Meeting **held at**

Forton Cricket Club **at 7:00p.m. on**

Wednesday 13th November 2024

Present: Councillors: S Spencer (Chair), D Carver (RFO), P Hammond (V Chair),
O Thomas, Z Young, A Hawkins

Borough Councillor: Scott Spencer

Clerk: C Little

Public Open Forum – No members of the public attended the meeting

24/001 Apologies were received from Cllr Winnington by email during the meeting.

24/002 There were no declarations of councillors' personal Interests.

24/003 Barbara Greatorex did not attend but had sent, ahead of the meeting, a comprehensive report on the works taking place at the Parish Hall. Cllr Young proposed a vote of thanks to Barbara which was unanimously approved and asked if she would also share the PowerPoint presentation she had used at the public meeting so that it could be uploaded to the Parish Council website.

ACTION: Clerk

24/004 **Minutes of Meeting 3rd July 2024 and matters arising not on this agenda**

The minutes of the meeting of 3rd July were accepted as a true and accurate Record and signed by the Chairman. There were no matters arising.

24/005 **Parish Councillor vacancy**

Cllr Thomas had received an expression of interest from a resident in Meretown. Unfortunately, this had not yet resulted in contact with the clerk. Councillors raised concerns that we still had no representation from Sutton. The clerk was asked to invite The Red Lion action group to our next meeting and ask if there was any interest in a member becoming a parish councillor.

ACTION: Clerk

24/006 **Finance Report**
1.1 **Financial Statement Quarter Three 2024/2025**

The Q3 financial statement dated 05 November 2024 was presented. It balanced to the latest bank statements: -

Current Account @ 05 November 2024	£125.00
Reserve Account @ 05 November 2024	£1,825.33
TOTAL	£1,950.33

There were no questions and the statement was signed by the Chairman.

24/006

1.2 Payments for Approval

Precept Payments	Budget £ p	Agreed to Pay
Clerk's Salary – 3rd quarter *(net)	£126.61	*£101.41
PAYE	nil	£25.20
Clerk's Expenses – 3rd quarter	£15.00	nil
Parish Hall Rent for 2024 (2 meetings only)	£141.75	£70.88
HugoFox website 'Bronze' subscription	125.95	invoice awaited

*The gross salary is £126.61; PAYE has been determined by the payroll service. Councillors considered each of the items above and approved items 1, 2 and 4 for payment by the RFO.

ACTION: RFO

24/006

1.3 Concurrent Grants

The RFO reminded the Council that Concurrent Grants for the current year must be paid by 31 March 2025 or risk being forfeit to Stafford Borough Council. The Council therefore needs to encourage applications which will need to be considered no later than the next meeting in March.

ACTION: Council

24/006

2.1 Budget 2025/2026

A draft budget for next year was tabled for discussion. It was based on the forecast to the year's end which indicated a precept balance being taken forward of £920.60. The budget, as drafted, would require a precept of £1,518.07 (including Council Tax Support Grant of £38.07 (last year £38.85)).

[The following agenda item, **24/009.2**, is taken at this point as it influences the budget.]

24/009

2.1 .gov.uk domain & emails

The draft budget included an item to provide **.gov.uk** email addresses for all Councillors and the Clerk, the cost of this being £252.00 per annum with a £100 grant available for the first year only. Although the use of **.gov.uk** emails is encouraged it is not mandatory. After considerable discussion it was agreed that the cost to this small Council would be disproportionate and so it was decided to remove this item from the budget. An error was also noted where general insurance had been overstated by £100. This would be corrected in the budget for approval.

A **.gov.uk** domain website address is being offered as an integral part of the HugoFox "Bronze" subscription beginning in January 2025. Because HugoFox is presently reorganising its invoicing and payments systems it is giving the Council 3 months (Oct – Dec 2024) service free of charge. Thereafter the cost for the Bronze subscription will be £143.88 per annum.

The Council discussed this offer at length and agreed to take the contract with HugoFox to provide the website domain with a **.gov.uk** suffix. The Council will incidentally save £16.02 per annum, the cost of the current “Reg 123” domain. The Council authorised the RFO to sign the HugoFox contract which is cancellable with 6 weeks’ notice on either side.

ACTION: RFO

**24/006
2.1**

Budget 2025/2026 (continued)

Inflation has fallen since last year, the Consumer Prices Index (CPIH – All items) in October 2024 was at +2.6%, so it is this figure that has been generally applied in the draft budget.

Clerk’s salary: The budget increases this in line with the general increase used for the rest of the budget i.e. 2.6% onto the basic salary of £126.61 (+£3.21) to make £129.90 (gross).

The general contingency remains at 20% which equates to £295.62 in the budget for approval. The reserve was carried forward at £300.00.

Stafford Borough Council confirmed that the concurrent grant will remain the same as recent years at £270.00. The Council authorised the RFO to ask SBC for this maximum figure as well as the precept required by the amended budget of £1,218.07.

ACTION: RFO

The precept requirement for the amended budget is shown in the table below together with the precepts for recent previous years:

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Year	Annual Precept £ p
2025-2026	1,218.07
2024-2025	1,302.85
2023-2024	1,229.65
2022-2023	1,045.46
2021-2022	1,110.83

The budget as amended was unanimously approved by the Council. The RFO would produce a fair copy for signature by the Chairman.

ACTION: RFO & Chairman

Councillors wished to thank the Cricket club for their hosting our meeting for a second time and ask if they would like to submit an invoice.

ACTION: Clerk

Cllr Scott Spencer to contact council to see if they were able to assist with gov.uk email addresses for the clerk and parish councillors

ACTION: Borough Cllr Spencer

24/007

To receive the following reports:

Feedback from courses and meetings attended

Cllr Spencer explained that following his chairman training he had spoken with the clerk to implement the recommendations as follows:

- Agenda items numerically recorded ascending throughout the year.
- No item to be discussed if it has not been listed on the agenda to ensure that members of the public have had the opportunity to consult with councillors.
- No item to be referred for discussion without relevant research/costing etc.

Reports from Borough and County Councillor

Borough Cllr Spencer advised that, following the change in government, the council had been told to increase the number of houses built annually from 350 on the previous local plan to 749. The council does not consider this feasible or sustainable and had pushed this back to the government.

Borough Cllr Spencer also advised that the community in Sutton was still committed to buying The Red Lion, which is now in a state of disrepair. He reported there had been several break-ins to which police had responded and that if the developer, who purchased the pub with a view to building houses on the plot, continued to resist selling it the property could be subject to a compulsory purchase order.

24/008

To report on A519

The clerk advised that she had researched and created documents for A national lottery community bid and it had become clear that:

- We would need to demonstrate the support of the community
- We would need to demonstrate the support of the County Council
- Fixed SIDs (speed indicator devices) are not recommended as drivers get used to them being there.
- We need assistance from the Highways department to establish the most impactful areas for welcome signage and planters. The clerk had therefore contacted Diane Firkins, Community Highway Engagement Officer to arrange a site meeting. This is planned for 28th November and councillors were advised they were welcome to attend. The clerk agreed to update councillors with the meeting time when it was confirmed.

ACTION: Clerk

- Councillors discussed whether the parish council should request an increase in parishioners levy if application for funds was not successful. It was unanimously agreed that this would need to be raised at a public meeting.

24/009

To discuss matters submitted for inclusion in this agenda

- The Chairman stated that having one councillor with responsibility for both Finance and the website left us in a vulnerable position in the event of sickness or absence. He expressed his gratitude to Cllr Carver for diligently applying himself to both tasks over the years. Cllr Young agreed that the responsibilities should be shared and said that if the clerk could also learn how to edit the website she would be keen to review the content and explore any additional functions available to us. The clerk agreed to meet with Cllr Carver for training.

ACTION: Clerk

- Cllr Carver shared the HugoFox proposal to provide **gov.uk** email addresses for councillors and explained that in the first year this was discounted by £100 but going forward would cost in the region of £250pa.
- Review and relaunch website and include links to Borough and County councils (Cllr Young) already addressed in **24/008**

- Use of website for community consultation and gathering views (Cllr Young) development of website already addressed in **24/008**
- Cllr Young presented a very detailed report on the cost and benefits of installing a Defibrillator in the community. She also confirmed that a partial grant may be available and sought approval to proceed with this. She further confirmed that The Swan Hotel would be willing to house the defibrillator. It was noted that there is currently no public building available to consider in Sutton. Because the remainder of costs and ongoing maintenance could not be funded from our existing precept it was agreed that the purchase of a defibrillator would also need to be raised at a public meeting.
- Councillors discussed the attendance of Borough Councillors and the County Councillor at the parish council meetings. They observed that the experience, knowledge and support they bring to the meetings has been invaluable over the years but attendance has been sporadic over the last year. It was acknowledged that their attendance is entirely voluntary, but their input has been missed, particularly as we have also lost parish councillors with experience.

24/010 Items requested for listing next agenda

- Litter Pick
- Public meeting(s) (Defibrillator, traffic calming initiatives, community engagement with website for opinions and surveys)
- Red Lion Action Group
- Nomination of trustees for Forton Charities

24/011 To confirm date and time of next meeting

12th March 2025, venue to be confirmed.

Meeting closed at 8.37 p.m.