

FORTON PARISH COUNCIL

Minutes of Meeting held in All Saints Church, Forton on Wednesday 14 May 2025

Present:

Councillors: S Spencer (Acting Chair), P Hammond, O Thomas, Z Young, A Hawkins.

Borough Councillors: Scott Spencer, Mark Winnington

Clerk: C Little

Prospective Councillor: C Tait

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

25/011 Apologies:

D Carver (RFO)

25/012 Prospective Councillor Chris Tait:

Parishioner Chris Tait was welcomed to the meeting. He had previously shared his interest in becoming a parish councillor by email. He now reiterated his desire to help the community and was voted unanimously onto the parish council. His acceptance of office was signed and declarations of pecuniary interest forms were issued.

25/013 Declarations of Councillors' personal interest

None

25/014 Minutes of Meeting 12 March 2025 and matters arising not on this Agenda

Minutes of Meeting for 12 March 2025 were agreed as a true record and signed by the Chair.

25/015 Finance related matters

-1 Financial Statement 2024/2025 Year-End - 31 March

The financial statement for the year ended 31 March 2025 had been circulated. It balanced to the bank statements covering the year-end with a closing balance of £1,070.76. This statement provides the information for page 6 of the annual return which has also been circulated and which requires the council's approval. (See paragraph 5 below).

The Council accepted the 2024/2025 Year End financial statement as a true record and the chairman signed a copy.

-2 Financial Statement 2025/2026 Quarter One

The financial statement dated for quarter one had been circulated. It balanced to the latest bank statements received with a closing balance of

£1,814.80, the first tranche of £744.04, Precept, Council Tax Grant and Concurrent monies having been received from Stafford Borough Council on 10 April.

The Council accepted the 2024/2025 quarter one financial statement as a true record and the chairman signed a copy.

-3 Insured Risks

The Council undertook its risk assessment by reviewing its proposed as specified in the proposed insurance schedule that had been circulated (appendix 1). Councillors satisfied themselves that the renewal, on the same terms as last year and at the same cost of £196.00, meets the risks the Council might face during the forthcoming year. (Insurance cover runs from 01 June to 31 May).

The Council agreed to continue with the insurance provided by Zurich Municipal on the terms offered for 01 June 2025 to 31 May 2026 at the premium of £196.00 (budget £211.15).

-4 Payments For Approval

Precept Payments	£.p	Budget £.p	Agreed £.p
Clerk's Salary (gross) – 1 st quarter	129.90	129.90	104.10
PAYE	tba	nil	25.80
Clerk's expenses	tba	15.00	
SPCA subscription 2025/26 @ £114.02	114.02	109.14	114.02
Zurich Insurance premium 2025/26	196.00	211.15	196.00
TOTALS	439.92	465.19	439.92

The Council approved the above payments and authorised the RFO to make them.

-5 Annual Audit 2024/2025

The audit papers need to be submitted before 30 June this year. The necessary notices for the exercise of electors' right to inspect accounts and records dated 02 June 2025 will be posted with the period allowing examination from 03 June 2025 to 14 July 2025 (30 working days).

The council: -

-5.1 had approved the Certificate of Exemption (from full audit) – AGAR 2024/25 (Page 3) at the meeting held on 12 March 2025 (minute ref: 25/005-4).

-5.2 noted receipt of the clean Annual Internal Audit Report 2024/25 (Page 4).

-5.3 addressed the Annual Governance Statement 2024/25, questions Nos 1 – 8 (Page 5) after which the Chairman & Clerk both signed.

-5.4 approved the Accounting Statements 2024/25 (Page 6) which had already been signed by the RFO and the Chairman now also signed.

-5.5 recorded a vote of thanks to Andrew Smith FCA for conducting our internal audit, without charge.

The clerk confirmed she had negotiated a rate of £40 for meetings at the cricket club, however; at a later meeting between the Chairman and the Cricket Club secretary, Ashley Gillum, this was further reduced to £37.50. Unfortunately, due to a cricket fixture, tonight's meetings could not be held at the CC but were instead held in the church. In the absence of Cllr Carver, Cllr Steve Spencer (Acting Chair) stated that he expected the church would receive some remuneration for its hospitality.

25/016 To receive the following reports:

- **Reports from Parish Councillors on meetings/ courses attended**

None

- **Reports from Borough and County Councillors**

Borough Councillor Scott Spencer gave an update on the following:

He confirmed that the Red Lion support group was preparing a business case to assist with a compulsory purchase application. He confirmed that he had offered to do a report in support of their plan and advised that they were still very committed to their cause.

Borough Councillor Winnington advised that the Local Plan had been suppressed and that both Gnosall and Eccleshall currently have significant building proposals. The borough's target of 800 homes per annum, set by the deputy prime minister, overrides any local plan. This opens the search for new building sites which will not be protected. He stated that whilst the figure may be achievable this year with 400 homes proposed in Eccleshall, this target would be more difficult in subsequent years

- **Update on Forton Village Hall**

An update on the works to Forton Village Hall from Barbara Greatorrex had been shared ahead of the meeting. The update confirmed that unfortunately, no progress had been made since the last update due to issues beyond their control, it did however, confirm that they had been successful in securing substantial funding from a national charity to complete the work. Councillors asked if the skip, which has been full for several months, could be removed from the site in the interim. The clerk agreed to contact Barbara Greatorrex.

ACTION CLERK

25/017 To consider feasibility of pursuing a lottery grant for A519

Cllr Mark Winnington advised that he was no longer our County Councillor and the request for funds for a speed survey would need to go to Wayne Titley. (At the time of writing Wayne Titley has resigned from his position). The clerk advised that her enquiries to the council had returned more questions than answers. There had been no assistance with securing an approved contractor, confirmation of Highways costs or permit to dig. Given the lack of budget to provide a contingency and her resignation from the parish council, the clerk stated that regrettably she did not feel able to pursue this further. The Acting Chair thanked the clerk for her efforts with the project.

25/018 To discuss matters submitted for inclusion in this agenda

- **Clerk Resignation**

The clerk had given notice that this would be her last meeting. The Acting Chair advised that councillors needed to consider the sustainability of a council in this parish. He stated that the council needed a proper officer in the role of parish clerk to function. Given the situation, following a discussion with the SPCA, he said that we had 3 options.

- 1 Appoint a new clerk.
- 2 The Borough Council could intervene providing temporary clerks to ensure the parish still functions whilst a replacement is secured.
- 3 Consider a merger with another parish. The Acting Chair had approached Norbury but advised that they are in a similar situation.

Cllr Young suggested that a merger would lead to a better use of funds. She also asked if we had the funds to recruit a clerk. Cllr Hammond stated that he had been a parish councillor for many years, and he felt it was important that the work of the parish council should continue, given the current climate with planning applications and the impending unitary authorities.

Cllr Winnington stated that the parish council, despite its size, had been just as successful in getting things done as much bigger councils. He suggested that it would be better to merge with another small parish rather than get lost in a bigger council.

The Acting Chair stated that he had been advised not to dissolve the parish. It was unanimously agreed that it was important that the parish should still have a representation and no immediate decision on its future was made.

It was concluded that we should pursue, in the first instance, sharing a clerk and secondly open dialogue about a possible merger. The clerk agreed to contact the Norbury clerk and Borough Cllr Spencer agreed to tentatively suggest a merger at the next Norbury meeting.

ACTION CLERK
ACTION SCOTT SPENCER

- **Website update**

The clerk confirmed that she had printed and laminated new pictures of the parish with the new website address and put them on all three noticeboards, she also confirmed that Cllr Carver had notified the borough council of the change to a GOV.UK URL and this had been updated on their website.

- **Gareth Higgins (Police Community Support and Rural Wildlife Officer)**

Gareth had been delayed by work commitments but arrived during item 25/018. He shared copies of data showing local crimes by offence group comparing figures this year with last year. Crime rates were low and including fly tipping when it had been reported to the police. Often these cases, which are dealt with by the council unless the tipping is on private land, are not reported unless there are drugs involved. Gareth explained that he was keen to extend the reporting to wildlife crimes such as hare coursing. Cllr Hawkins confirmed that he had recent experience of this on his farm and that two of his gates had

been broken to gain access. Gareth asked the clerk to share his email address and advised that the police now had a mobile station which could be utilized for events and incidents. Gareth was thanked for his contribution to the meeting.

ACTION CLERK

25/019 Items requested for listing next agenda

Update on future of parish council.

25/020 Next meeting

Wednesday 16 July at 7pm at Forton cricket club (subject to fixtures).

Meeting closed at 8:43pm