



MARTOCK PARISH COUNCIL

Minutes of the Martock Parish Council meeting held on Wednesday 20th December 2023 in the Parish Hall, Church Street, Martock at 7:00pm.

PRESENT: Councillors John Hole (Chair), Joy Bailey (Deputy Chair), Ashley Chapman, Louise Clarke, Paul Helyer, Alan Potter, Alison Warne, Ash Warne, Tony Welsh, Sylvia Williams and Neil Williams

ALSO PRESENT: Peter Finnis (Locum Clerk), Tracy Lamb (RFO), Emily Dawson (Operations Manager), and Caroline Bennett and Naomi Glass (Community Support Team)

The Chair also welcomed the Council's incoming Chief Executive, Natalie Fortt, who would be formally taking up her post in February, and was present in an observational capacity.

Public participation time

Two members of the public were in attendance. No matters were raised.

107/23 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were reported from Councillors Suzanne Luxton and Graham Macdonald, and Somerset Councillors John Bailey and Emily Pearlstone.

108/23 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no Declarations of Interest made.

109/23 MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

The Locum Clerk reported on a matter arising from minute 101/23 in respect of Task Groups where it was stated that consideration of a previously agreed Youth Provision Task Group would be deferred. This was based on the understanding that this Task Group had yet to meet. It had now been established that this Task Group was active and undertaking work on reviewing the Council's future youth service provision.

Resolved: 1. (With 1 abstention) That the continuation of the Youth Provision Task Group be noted and that the group will report its findings and recommendations to Council in due course.

2. That the minutes of the Council meeting held on 22nd November 2023 be approved as a correct record.

110/23 COUNCIL BUDGET 2024/25

Council considered a proposed draft budget and covering report from the RFO for 2024/25. The proposed budget was based on maintaining existing service levels, adding known unavoidable cost growths, and identifying possible cost cutting efficiencies. The RFO also produced budget monitoring reports upto the end of November which showed that the Council was broadly on course to deliver a balanced budget at year-end. The Clerk also proposed transfer of a number of earmarked reserves to fund in-year work and increase the general reserve.

The Council acknowledged the need to build the current level of general reserves and make the necessary adjustments to meet the challenge of rising costs in a number of areas, in particular utility bills. There was also discussion in respect of setting aside contingency funding in order to be able to intervene in the event if cuts in important services by Somerset Council. However, members were mindful that any amount set aside would be purely speculative at this stage as there was no substantive information from Somerset to go on.

Resolved (with 1 abstention):

1. That the proposed draft budget for 2024/25 be approved subject to the following amendments:

- (a) That a sum of £2.5k be made available for the provision of secure storage facilities at the Pavilion.
- (b) That (a) above be funded by reducing the proposed allocation of £10k to £7.5k for tree works in line 4130.
- (c) That additional provision be made in the budget (provisionally around £2k) to provide signage and height restriction barriers at the recreation ground car park to combat ongoing anti-social behaviour.
- (d) That, subject to clarification from Somerset, the provision of a £5k donation towards library services (4645) be withdrawn.
- (e) That in anticipation of likely significant increased costs in the recreation ground main contract when it is retendered, the funding allocation in line 4501 be increased from £8.8k to £12k.
- (f) That an additional £5k be made to the allocation for provision of youth services (line 4371).

2. That, with regard to earmarked reserves, approval be given for the following:

- Full use of the tennis court EMR to fund the surfacing works undertaken in the current year.
- Use of £2.7k from the Covid 19 EMR to fund the need for urgent replacement IT equipment (see minute 111/23 below).
- Maintain the Planning Contingency EMR but rename it 'Planning and Community' to enable funds to be used to contribute towards both the Neighbourhood Plan and a Council/Corporate Strategic Plan.

- Seek clarification from Somerset in respect of the permitted usages in respect of CIL funds.
- Transfer the remaining part of the Covid 19 EMR together with all the other EMRs, with the exception of the Quinquennial EMR, to the General Reserve, in order to bring the latter closer to the recommended minimum level.

3. That, based on all of the above, the RFO is instructed to produce a revised draft budget for circulation to members with a number of indicative precept levels, should the Council wish to put additional contingency sums in place.

4. That the Parish Council formally records its concern at the continued lack of substantive information from Somerset in regard to potential service cuts which, at this late stage, may have a significant impact on the Martock community without the Parish Council being able to properly plan for, with any degree of financial accuracy.

111/23 STAFF I.T. UPGRADES

The Locum Clerk submitted a report identifying urgently required replacement IT equipment for staff in order for the office to be able to properly function. The minimum requirement at this time was for 3 replacement laptops with further replacements needed in 2024/25. These would need to be suitable for business use and fully set up. Cloudy IT had quoted an all-inclusive cost of £900 per laptop.

Resolved (with 1 abstention): 1. That 3 new laptops be procured from CloudyIT as a matter of urgency, to be funded by monies currently sitting in earmarked reserves for Covid 19 contingency.

2. That the need for growth in the 2024/25 budget to fund additional procurements of replacement IT kit be noted.

112/23. REALTAS YEAR END SCHEMES

Council was recommended to purchase either the bronze, silver or gold scheme for the purpose of year-end accounting closedown and annual support and maintenance. The 3-year gold scheme would yield the largest discount at an annual cost of £825 per set of income and expenditure accounts and £540 per set of receipt and payment accounts,

Resolved (with 1 abstention): That the Realtas 3-year gold scheme package be purchased from 1st April 2024.

113/23. CO-OPTING OF NEW MEMBERS

Resolved: That the Clerk be authorised to commence the formal co-opting process after the Christmas and New Year break, in order to fill the two current vacancies on the Council.

114/23. FORTHCOMING MEETINGS

- (a) Planning and Highways Committee – Wednesday 10th January 2024 at 7.00pm.
- (b) Council – Wednesday 24th January 2024 at 7.00pm.

Noted.

The meeting closed at 7.40pm.

Chair

Date