



**AUDLEM**  
PARISH COUNCIL

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Chair: Derek Winskill  
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Minutes of meeting of Audlem Parish Council  
held in the Methodist Church, Shropshire St. Audlem  
**on Monday 9<sup>th</sup> January 2023 at 7.00pm.**

## PART A

**Present:** Cllrs Derek Winskill [DW](Chair), Geoff Seddon [GS] (Vice Chair Finance Committee), Jean Stainthorpe [JS], Paul Cawood [PC], Chris May [CM], Kate Down [KD], Steve Elliott [SE], Adriana Roscoe [AR].

**In attendance:** Dr Kate Howe (Locum Clerk), Rachel Bailey (Cheshire East Ward Councillor), Jackie Weaver (ChALC).

**Members of the public (MOP):** 9

**22/111 Apologies for absence** received from Cllrs. Tim Lawton

### **22/112 Public Participation / Open Forum**

- MOP questioned why original 2022-23 budget of £17,900 had been revised to £34,098. £23,000 had been spent on the Clerk. Why £28k for admin when the Clerk role was advertised at £13k. GS responded yes that was correct. APC had to contract agency Locum Clerk in the short term. Those bills contain VAT so not as high a cost as appear as VAT will be reclaimed. APC started interviewing for permanent Clerk today.
- MOP questioned how many hours Locum Clerk has worked per month. Clerk responded worked more than previous p/t Clerk hours, due to challenging business needs impacting, probably an average of 28 per week, but all clearly stated on timesheets and invoices. MOP requested Clerk notify her in writing as FOI request the exact number of hours charged per month.
- MOP stated he had an acute interest in the loss of £163k from APC account.
  1. What signing procedures were in place? GS responded as far as aware requirement for 2 signatories.
  2. What procedures changed to ensure it didn't happen again? GS responded Santander account has been frozen and APC have changed bank to Lloyds.
  3. Has fraud been enacted previously on APC account? GS responded there has never been a previous incident. Clerk replied (for clarity and transparency) there had been a previous occurrence, in which money was 'sent' from APC account to a personal

account and immediately returned. This was investigated by Santander, and formally reported by the bank as 'no 'fault' of anyone connected to APC.

4. MOP stated glad to hear bank account frozen and changed to new bank.
- MOP questioned:
    1. Why new internal auditor appointment, it should be new external auditor appointment to oversee governance? Clerk responded external auditor was appointed nationally to all Parish and Town Councils – PKF Littlejohn. JW explained no external body, not even internal / external auditors, Monitoring Officer or Principal Council have any authority to come in to make changes to governance arrangements or insist on strengthening financial / procedural arrangements in a Parish Council. It is down to the individual Parish Council as a corporate body to ensure their governance arrangements meet legal requirements and proper practice. GS stated that APC has appointed an internal auditor.
    2. Noted major increase in insurance expenditure – did you get tenders? Clerk explained 8 insurance companies were contacted and requested to quote. Only 2 quotes offered. Problem experienced across the sector. Insurance companies have made commercial decision to withdraw from the local council market. Clerk had sought personal intervention from Director of National Association of Local Councils who had intervened personally on behalf of Audlem PC to obtain most cost-effective cover.
    3. Has the missing money been repaid? GS responded, unfortunately not. This is a significant and long-term investigation underway by the police, Santander and a forensic accounts auditor.
    4. As a result, the precept has doubled, this is a bitter pill to swallow. GS responded we all feel the same way. To put into context last year precept for Band D was £52.49. But APC had resolved to use £20,316 from reserves to limit precept request. If they hadn't, theoretically precept request for Band D would have been £71.68 last year. In 2023-24 budget we have to repay ChALC 'loan' (at no interest – many thanks to ChALC) on payments made for APC and also need to rebuild a '3 month reserve' for pre-committed expenditure (£56k). If you take the £56k out of the equation theoretical Band D would be £68.54. So when you compare 'apples with apples', rather than 'apples with pears' the precept request is actually a decrease on last year. Hence, a PC precept request should revert to normal levels next year. Yes, we were concerned at being forced to put up the precept this year when everyone is 'strapped for cash' due to 'cost of living' increases. If, and when, we get the money back from 'alleged fraud', that will go back to council taxpayers in Audlem by reduced precept request following receipt.
    5. Few Band D properties in Audlem so information on impact provided for other Bands wasn't available. GS agreed to include all Bands in the minutes of January meeting, but pointed out that this information had been made available via APC website and noticeboard in December and an AOL statement also had links to APC website to make it easy for residents to access this information.

The proposed amount for each Band is:

Band	Annual	Weekly	Increase per week
	£	£	£
A	80.58	1.55	0.88
B	94.01	1.80	1.02

C	107.44	2.06	1.17
D	120.87	2.32	1.31
E	147.73	2.83	1.60
F	174.59	3.35	1.90
G	201.44	3.86	2.18
H	241.73	4.64	2.63

6. Any update on police, fraud investigation, Ombudsman and insurance claims. Clerk responded all are being actioned and chased regularly, but unfortunately this will be a long externally driven process.

- MOP requested further information on 'alleged fraud' on Santander bank account.
  1. Have members of Council been interviewed and submitted statements to the Police? Clerk responded. Yes, I believe they have.
  2. Were members of Council interviewed under caution? Clerk responded. No, I believe they were interviewed, and statements supplied, as witnesses.
  3. MOP stated Council should be aware these members may be called to give evidence in court. Confidentiality protocols are required.
  4. What process are you using to protect members from risk of abuse? These people are being publicly called out as 'corrupt' by association. Rachel Bailey interjected it was essential APC obtain police advice of response to councillors receiving public abuse.
  5. MOP made complaint of recently co-opted APC council member making reference to fraud in online post. APC needs to formally clarify to every member of Council how they conduct themselves in public. Due to potential to undermine any prosecution all members need to ensure they remain silent on the matter. Need to ensure this does not happen in the future.
  6. MOP offered advice on potential paths on debt recovery. Clerk responded she has already taken advice from the police on his suggestions and been told unfortunately these steps proposed are not relevant to this case.
  7. MOP stated he hoped APC were in close contact with Economic Crime Team. Clerk confirmed that was the case.
  8. MOP suggested APC need advice from a specialist solicitor and he was happy to put them in contact with such.
  9. MOP asked are APC putting Turnpike Field into 'Fields in Trust'? The land is held in perpetuity for public use. If so this stops any potential development on the field or asset release.. JS responded that we would look into setting up a public meeting.

**22/113**      **Declarations of Interest** – there were none

**22/114**      **Requests for Dispensations** – there were none

**22/115**      **Confirmation of Minutes**

**JS proposed, GS seconded, Council RESOLVED** to approve the Minutes of the meeting held on **12<sup>th</sup> December 2022**

**22/116**      **Welcome to new Co-opted Councillors**

Council **NOTED** and Chair welcomed 4 new councillors attending meeting who have accepted co-option invitation to join Audlem Parish Council:

- Kate Down
- Chris May
- Steve Elliott
- Adriana Roscoe

Council **NOTED:**

- a) new co-opted councillors signing Acceptance of Office and Declarations of Interest forms
- b) new councillors have received their APC councillor email addresses and induction packs. The Clerk reminded co-opted councillors to use only their APC email accounts for correspondence on APC matters.
- c) need for new councillor training identified and basic 'roles and responsibilities' available through ChALC initially. Following elections specific Finance and Planning training will be arranged for Chairs and Committee / Working Group members.

**22/117**      **New Committee / Group Members**

Due to councillor resignations, and co-options of new councillors, consider, elected and approved:

- a) Council elected Geoff Seddon as new Vice Chair of Parish Council – JS proposed, PC seconded, Council unanimously **RESOLVED**.
- b) Council elected Chris May and Kate Down as new members of Planning Group. Appointment of Vice Chair was delegated to Planning Group to determine at next meeting. GS proposed, DW seconded, Council unanimously **RESOLVED**.
- c) Council elected Chris May and Steve Elliott as new members of Finance Committee. GS proposed, PC seconded, Council unanimously **RESOLVED**.
- d) Council elected Adriana Roscoe as new member of Staffing Committee. JS proposed, DW seconded, Council unanimously **RESOLVED**.
- e) Council elected Steve Elliott as new member of Communication Group. GS proposed, JS seconded, Council unanimously **RESOLVED**.
- f) Council elected Steve Elliott, Kate Down and Adriana Roscoe as new members of TFWG. DW proposed, JS seconded, Council unanimously **RESOLVED**.
- g) Council elected Kate Down, Chris May, Adriana Roscoe as new members of **Village Management Group**. Appointment of new Chair was delegated to Planning Group to determine at next meeting. GS proposed, SE seconded, Council unanimously **RESOLVED**.

**22/118**      **Planning Matters**

No new Planning Matters notified since last meeting.

**22/119**      **Financial Matters**

- 22/119 (a)      Council considered the newly approved Scheme of Delegation. It was **NOTED** only one item did not match the Financial Regulations approved in May 2022 at item:

*Financial Regulations 1.2 (c) Clerk's Authority - the Clerk, in conjunction with Chair of Council or Chair of the appropriate committee or working group, for any items up to and including £500.*

*Scheme of Delegation - Clerk's Authority to authorise routine expenditure within the agreed budget of £1.500.*

Council considered, GS proposed, JS seconded, Council **RESOLVED** to confirm change to Scheme of Delegation to £500 on Clerk's delegated authority.

- 22/119 (b) Council considered the newly approved Scheme of Delegated Authorities, checked and **NOTED** confirmation that these match the Standing Orders approved in May 2022
- 22/119 (c) GS proposed, DW seconded, Council **RESOLVED** to give retrospective approval to payments made (via ChALC) from 9<sup>th</sup> December 2022 to 6<sup>th</sup> January 2023 (as schedule circulated) authorised by the Clerk using delegated authorities (since November meeting) due to urgent business need.
- 22/119 (d) Council considered, GS proposed, CM seconded, Council unanimously **RESOLVED** to confirm the precept request made by the Clerk as directed to Cheshire East for 2023/24 as £129,314 (130% increase).
- 22/119 (e) Due to councillor resignation, Council **NOTED** DW had completed the form for the removal of Ralph Warburton as signatory on both Lloyds and Santander bank accounts. Confirmed had been sent in post to both banks. DW to scan and send forms to Clerk for records.
- 22/119 (f) Due to councillor resignation, Council elected and unanimously **RESOLVED** Chris May and Kate Down as new named signatories on Lloyds bank account.
- 22/119 (g) Due to councillor resignation, Council elected and unanimously **RESOLVED** Tim Lawton, Geoff Seddon and Jean Stainthorpe be added as new named signatories to Santander bank account.
- 22/119 (h) Council **NOTED** that due to urgent business need to get newly co-opted councillors on-line with their APC email accounts, Clerk had used delegated authority to contract Tech Media to provide IT support.

## **22/120 Communications**

Council **NOTED** the release of four public statements in December:

- Moving On issued 2.12.22
- APC Toilets re-opened Notice issued 21.12.22
- APC Budget Statement issued 23.12.22
- Precept Explanation issued 20.12.22

## **22/121 Staffing Matters**

Council **NOTED** report from Vice-Chair of Staffing Committee on progress:

- (a) Lengthsman – has received and signed new contract. Finalised document still to be supplied electronically to Locum Clerk for filing. Negotiation on reduction in hours still not been addressed. This is an urgent priority for Staffing Committee to agree with Lengthsman.
- (b) Recruitment of Permanent Parish Clerk – 2 applicants interviewed today, third applicant being interviewed on Monday. GS confirmed APC would be using the



NALC contract as the basis for new permanent Clerk. This is an urgent priority for Staffing Committee. JW advised she expected the Locum Clerk to be required to remain in post until the end of the financial year (end March), as previously advised, and she has budgeted accordingly. Effective and positive handover arrangements from Locum Clerk to new Permanent Clerk to be agreed. Locum Clerk on 4 weeks rolling contract so requires clarity for managing her work commitments.

#### **22/122 Turnpike Field**

Council **NOTED** Chair of Turnpike Field Working Group reported:

- Grant application been prepared to Community Cash Fund for alteration to Field entrance due to road safety. SE meeting PCSO Nick Jarvis tomorrow to approve. Thanks to SE for work producing application. TFWG request approval from Council to make grant application. GS proposed, AR seconded, Council unanimously **RESOLVED**.
- Muddy path works progressing well due to great deal of hard work from volunteers. Council expressed thanks to TFWG volunteers.
- New notice board (previously unresolved for location) requested by TFWG to be repurposed for use on Turnpike Field. GS to seek approval from maker and donor.
- 2 bookings for Turnpike Field received and approved:
  - i. PAU shop in Audlem – 10 week booking for Saturdays 28 January to 1 April 2023 – FOC.
  - ii. Historic Boats event – 26-31 July 2023 – car parking.

#### **22/123 Village Management**

- a) Council noted the number of spaces in the Car Park will be reduced for 35 weeks due the alterations to Audlem Medical Practice. Council considered need to request Clerk write to Cheshire East to allow parking outside the marked bays during this period. Council unanimously **RESOLVED**.
- b) Councillors **RESOLVED** to approve retrospective delegated authority to Clerk for actioning change of use / regrading of dog bin to general waste to include both bagged dog waste and litter on verge near Vicarage Lane and footbridge.
- c) Highways meeting on 11<sup>th</sup> January (circulated to VM group). CM volunteered to attend meeting and report back.
- d) KD advised of overhanging hedge on Paddock Lane causing traffic problems. KD as member of Village Management working group volunteered to speak to owner of property.

#### **23/124 Report by Ward Councillor**

Cheshire East Councillor Rachel Bailey reported:

- Met with Audlem Village Signs – using her budget she is trying to get signage improvements made.
- Highways – no works done other than emergency callouts between Christmas and New Year. Repairing potholes has been difficult due to weather impacts.

#### **23/125 Office Matters**

Council **NOTED** brief update from Locum Clerk

- a) Claim actioned to Santander Bank
- b) Complaint actioned to Finance Ombudsman

- c) CE notified of Precept request and change of recipient to APC Lloyds Bank
- d) Clerk had written to John Bower notifying of his dis-qualification
- e) Clerk written to Lloyds bank questioning charges on account – relevant to Precept payment

**23/126 Items for Future Agenda**

None notified.

**23/127 Date of Next Meeting**

The next meeting will be held on **Monday 13<sup>th</sup> February 2023** in the **Methodist Church, Shropshire St, Audlem, Crewe CW3 0AE**

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**PART B**

Council considered offer for 'no win / no fee action' on debt recovery. Council **NOTED** any arrangement would need to be capped on costs, professional fees, expenses accruing. Council **NOTED** other contractors available may make similar offer – hence need competitive tenders. Clerk delegated to arrange initial advice meeting.

Chair thanked Councillors for their support and attendance. **Meeting closed 10.30 pm.**