

COSHESTON COMMUNITY COUNCIL
**Minutes of the meeting held in the Village Hall
At 7.30pm on Tuesday 5th March 2024**

Present: Cllr N James (Chair); Cllr T Wilson; Cllr S Myatt; Cllr G Mills; Cllr N Gullam,
Cllr N Burgess, Cllr M Fielding, Cllr T Hodgson
In attendance: S Scourfield (Clerk), 2 residents & PCSO Sophie

2476 Apologies
Cllr S Gibson

2476a Public Statement relating to Cosheston Community Council Funds

The chair Cllr N James made the following statement –

As you are aware, late last year it was published that there was a discrepancy with the financial accounts of Cosheston Community Council and that the matter was being investigated by Dyfed Powys Police. Unfortunately, with the recent sudden passing of Mr Jacob Taylor, the Police have now closed their investigation as there is now no suspect for them to investigate.

In August of last year, I was contacted by Dyfed Powys Police responding to an allegation of theft from Cosheston Community Council Funds. No Councillors past or present were implicated in this allegation. As a result, the former Clerk had his access to the Bank Accounts frozen and we managed to gain access and control of the Council's email account. A very limited amount of Council related paperwork was recovered from his address but the Council owned Laptop has never been recovered. As a result of accessing the email account, we were able to ascertain that as well as fraudulently taking control of the Council's Bank Accounts, Mr Taylor had also not carried out many duties which were required of him as Clerk.

Despite seeing financial spreadsheets etc at past meetings, Mr Taylor during his tenure never submitted any accounts for Auditing despite assurances that he had done so. Emails found from Audit Wales showed that they had been chasing him for over 2 years for these outstanding accounts. No council members were ever aware of this. The lack of any kind of record keeping, documentation and obviously the laptop have made the task of providing some kind of accounts to Audit Wales very difficult, but we are working closely with them and should have something for them very soon.

With reference to the Bank Accounts, it was discovered that Mr Taylor had fraudulently changed the Unity Trust Internet Banking from 2-person Authorisation to 1-person Authorisation, forging signatures on applications resulting in naming himself as the main contact for the accounts. Other individuals named on the accounts as signatories for cheques, etc were not made aware of this by Unity Trust due to changes Mr Taylor had made within the account regarding contact

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preferences. Account Balances stated at monthly meetings were fictitious and bore no resemblance to the amounts which truly sat in our accounts.

Though we are not able to say definitively how much Mr Taylor stole from Cosheston Community Council's Bank Accounts, it is safe to say that the figure is in excess of £30,000. We are in the process of filing insurance claims in an attempt to recoup a large proportion of that money.

Going forward, the Council has employed an experienced clerk to help steer us through this very difficult time and Sarah is implementing the necessary changes to set us up properly for the future and I thank her for her understanding and commitment in the role she has taken on. We are working with Audit Wales to provide them with as much information as required in order to submit accounts to them.

The Internet Banking now has 5 different registered users, with all transactions being changed to 3-person Authorisation and the email account can now be accessed by the Clerk, Chair and Vice Chair, in order to check that no communications are being missed.

I can honestly say that the past 14 months have been the hardest and most stressful in my life to date. Unfortunately, we were all duped by a con man who played the role of Clerk. With his credentials of working for an MP and having House of Commons security clearance, surely there could be no-one more trustworthy? Unfortunately, we were wrong and our failing was that we put our trust in someone who was employed to supposedly aid, advise & steer us in the ways of local government but ultimately did none of those things.

2477 Declarations of interest

None

2478 Questions and answer session from members of the public

Open Gardens – 15th June 2024

It was commented that the Open Gardens Day was coming up on 15th June. Members of the public questioned who planted the tyres. The chair informed members that he did that and would do it again this year. The members of the public offered their support with this. The Chair informed all present that Valero would be providing some volunteers to help tidy The Cross area before the event.

PCSO Introduction

Cllr T Hodgson introduced the PCSO for the area to all present, Sophie informed members that she covers Cosheston, Lamphey & Hundleton but is based in Pembroke Dock. She stated that she intends to be more visible in the village by doing regular walkarounds as well as attending more meetings which take place in the village. She also stated that if anyone wanted to contact her the best way would be through Cllr T Hodgson who would pass on any requests.

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2479 Approval of Minutes 6th February 2024

Minutes of the meeting were approved – Proposed by Cllr N Gullam
Seconded by Cllr T Wilson

2480 Matters Arising from those minutes.

2480a (2470b) It was confirmed the bid had been written and we were just waiting for policies to be adopted along with a set of accounts before it can be submitted.

2480b (2470g) The chair confirmed the bike shelter application was ready for submission.

2480c (2470d) It was confirmed the bid was almost complete and the required information on Cosh Callout had been obtained.

2480d (2470h) It was questioned if there had been any update on the container removal. It was confirmed the land surrounding the container was still too wet for it to be removed.

2480e (2475a) It was confirmed the weather had also been too wet for the disabled signs to be painted in the village hall car park.

2481. Report of the Town Clerk

a) Update on Administrative documentation

The Clerk informed members that she had undertaken an audit of some of the documents held by Council and there are some updates which are required. The updates included the following:

- Agenda
- Clerks Report
- Register of Interests
- IRPW returns

The Clerk stated that it is regulation that agendas summon councillors to attend meetings, and also provides as much information as possible to the public with regards to the items to be discussed. You will note within the agenda there is an option for members of the public to address the council during the meeting, along with information on the clerks report for the public to understand discussions at the meeting.

She stated the Clerks report will provide more information on the items which are due to be discussed and will also provide information to councillors to help aid an informed discussion and decision-making process.

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The register of interests is a statutory document all members MUST complete it and MUST keep it up to date, the Clerk stated that she would therefore require all members to update these documents which she would provide.

The Independent Remuneration Panel for Wales (IRPW) review allowances paid to Councillors. The information relating to this should be provided on a yearly basis and the clerk stated that she would advise further on this process later in the meeting.

All members agreed to adopt the new documents and meeting format.

b) 2024/2025 Meeting Dates

The Clerk informed members of the meeting dates for 24/25

2nd April 2024

7th May 2024 – AGM

4th June 2024

2nd July 2024

6th August 2024

3rd September 2024

1st October 2024

5th November 2024

3rd December 2024

7th January 2025

4th February 2025

4th March 2025

1st April 2025

6th May 2025 - AGM

c) Nominations for chair for 24/25

The Clerk informed members that the chair of the Council should be reviewed on a yearly basis. Members are able to propose the chair is in position for longer than one year but this needs to be clearly documented.

The Clerk asked members for their nominations for chair for 24/25 period and the length of time you wish this chair to be in place.

It was proposed that Cllr N James is chair for the 24/25 period, this was agreed by all members.

d) Councillor Allowances

The Independent Remuneration Panel for Wales review and advise on allowances for councillors. They state that no Councillor should be out of pocket for undertaking the role as Councillor. As part of this it is mandatory that all Town & Community Councils are paid the following

- Basic Payment of £156 (equivalent to £3 per week) towards extra household expenses (including heating, lighting, power and broadband) of working from home
- Reimbursement for Consumables of £52 (£1 per week) towards the cost of all office consumables used whilst working from home as a Councillor.

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The Clerk stated that she had sent all Councillors the letter suggested by the Independent Remuneration Panel for Wales to review and sign. This was to confirm that Councillors are not claiming an allowance from anywhere else for the consumables used to conduct their council business. These payments are not subject to tax purposes.

The Clerk stated that payments are mandatory but if anyone did not want to accept the payment, they MUST note this on the form provided which MUST be returned.

e) Town and Community Council Website

The Clerk informed members that the website for the Council was currently being provided through PCC, she stated they have informed all Town and Community Councils in Pembrokeshire that this agreement was now coming to an end and alternative arrangements would need to be in place by 31st March 2025.

PAVS and PLANED are working with PCC to assess options for Councils to ensure specifications are met and options are provided. Cllr T Wilson had recently attended two meetings with regards to this and is working with PCC to find a suitable way forward.

Cllr T Wilson commented that he had attended two meetings to discuss a way forward and had produced a site using Google Sites which is free to all users with a Gmail address. He commented that he had put something together and emailed it out to Councillors. He also commented that St Dogmaels have a similar setup. Members agreed to leave the building of the website to Cllr T Wilson working with the Clerk.

f) Financial Donation Requests

The Clerk informed members of the Council that they have received a donation request from Marie Cure to assist with funding for services within the local area, she commented that these types of applications are starting to come in on a more regular basis. The Clerk suggested that the Council have a policy of how these requests are dealt with. She commented that with any financial request there should be evidence from the organisation on the funds which they hold and the reasons for the application and council should ensure the funds provided are seen to benefit the area of Cosheston.

The Clerk suggested a financial request policy was put in place and added to the financial regulations as a safeguard document for these types of requests. Members agreed for a policy to be brought to the next meeting for agreement.

g) Requirement of Policies

The Clerk commented that further to the review of documents and the application for an Enhancing Pembrokeshire Grant at PCC, it has been highlighted the need of additional policies within the council. The suggested policies at present are:

- Equalities Policy

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- Environmental Policy
- Welsh Language Policy

The Clerk commented that these documents were sent to members for review and it was agreed for Councillors to review the policies and email the clerk with any comments.

h) West Farm Solar Application

Cllr T Hodgson confirmed this application was deferred from the PCC Planning Committee meeting on 13th February 2024 and commented that there were to be some changes made to the application due to it being recommended for refusal. It has now been modified and it was now recommended for approval at the next meeting. Cllr T Hodgson confirmed that she would keep members updated with the progress of the application.

i) PCC – Speed Limit Order

Pembrokeshire County Council have advertised the following:

- a number of 40mph buffer limits on A, B & heavily trafficked C Class Roads
- amend minor discrepancies in respect of the position of new 20mph/settlement/terminal signs recently installed
- introduce a new 30mph limit and an advisory 20mph limit.

The information relating to the order is available via the link below, please note the areas do not affect the village of Coshaston.

<https://www.pembrokeshire.gov.uk/traffic-regulation-orders>

j) Hate Crime Training

The Clerk informed members that the Hate Crime Training and Engagement Officer from victim support organisation had contacted all Town and Community Councils with regards to training which they are offering to everyone highlighting hate crime and how to deal with scenarios of hate crime. She commented that she had included below a copy of the training dates which they are offering. If anyone would like to attend any, please let the Clerk know. It was questioned if this training could be offered out to the schools, the Clerk commented that she would ask if this was possible.

Training Session	Online	Date	Time	Eventbrite Link
Online Hate	Zoom	Thu, 22 Feb 2024	12pm - 2pm	https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/763881258407
ASB Hate Crime	Zoom	Tue, 20 Feb 2024	1pm - 2pm	https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/763883113957
Understanding Hate Crime	Zoom	Wed, 28 Feb 2024	12pm - 2pm	https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/763883344647
ASB Hate Crime	Zoom	Wed, 13 Mar 2024	10am - 11am	https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/763883605427
Understanding Hate Crime	Zoom	Thu, 14 Mar 2024	10am - 11am	https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/763887697667
Understanding Hate Crime	Zoom	Tue, 19 Mar 2024	12pm - 2pm	https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/76388730757
Online Hate	Zoom	Thu, 21 Mar 2024	12pm - 2pm	https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/763889152017

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The Clerk informed members that Pembrokeshire County Council would be advertising “The ‘Note to Self’ campaign, featuring giant sticky notes with handwritten reminders to ensure everyone is registered to vote and bring ID to the polling station”.

Posters will be found in noticeboards and public areas around Pembrokeshire.

The Clerk commented that the Council had been provided with a leaflet to raise the awareness of cannabis farms, the information will be put on the local noticeboard.

The Clerk commented that she was now able to provide members with a copy of the accounts information to allow for budgeting moving forward, these are the figures which will be used for audit purposes. She informed members that there had been no external audits completed in the last 4 years and therefore these figures needed to be reviewed and agreed by members.

1								
2								
3	Summary							
4								
5		2019-20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24 (to 07/09/23)	Totals	
6	Opening Balance	20589	32739.44	32963.62	20142.2	16994.04		
7								
8	Precept	6750	6750	6750	6750	4484		31484
9	Windfarm	2789.69	2895.83	2834.99	3016.99	1417.4		12954.9
10	VAT	5382.79	0	0	0	0		5382.79
11	Football rents	780	0	0	750	900		2430
12	Interest	80.52	20.07	12.15	130.85	68.78		312.37
13	Other	410	0	0	722.5	0		1132.5
14	Total receipts	16193	9665.9	9597.14	11370.34	6870.18		53696.56
15								
16	Payments to Clerk - K Donohue	607.62	0	0	0	0		607.62
17	Payments to Clerk Jacob Taylor	1223.89	4069.89	16647.4	7693.3	6842.04		36476.52
18	Utilities	406	462	438	472	237		2015
19	Bank charges	72	72	72	72	18		306
20	s137	150	20	0	600	0		770
21	Payments to individuals	288.98	191.31	1689.66	300	430.53		2900.48
22	Payments to suppliers	126	2870.8	2447.28	5111.2	2585		13140.28
23	SLCC	63	70	0	0	0		133
24	Audit Wales	0	552.75	0	0	0		552.75
25	OneVoiceWales	0	125	0	0	0		125
26	Insurance	980.07	1007.97	1114.12	0	0		3102.16
27	Village Hall	120	0	0	250	0		370
28	Pembroke Dock TC	0	0	0	20	0		20
29	PCC	5	0	10	0	0		15
30	Total payments	4042.56	9441.72	22418.56	14518.5	10112.57		60533.91
31								
32	Carried forward	32739.44	32963.62	20142.2	16994.04	13751.65		
33								
34								
35	Deposit AC	20123.79	20143.86	19156.01	12286.86	9255.64		
36	Current AC	12651.65	12819.76	986.21	4707.2	4496.03		
37		32775.44	32963.62	20142.22	16994.06	13751.67		
38	Less o/s chqs	36	0	0	0	0		
39		32739.44	32963.62	20142.22	16994.06	13751.67		
40								

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		2018/19 audited (for prior year figures on 19/20 return)	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23		2023/24 (to 7/9/24)	
1	Balances b/f	45798	20589	32739	32964	20142		16994	
2	Income from local taxation/levy	6750	6750	6750	6750	6750		4484	
3	Total other receipts	5708	9443	2916	2847	4620		2386	
4	Staff costs	1500	1500	1500	1500	1500		750	
5	Loan interest/capital repayments	0	0	0	0	0		0	
6	Total other payments	36167	2543	7941	20919	13018		9362	
7	Balances carried forward	20589	32739	32964	20142	16994		13752	
8	Debtors & stock balances	0	0	0	0	0		0	
9	Total cash and investments	20589	32739	32964	20142	16994		13752	
10	Creditors	0	0	0	0	0		0	
11	Balances carried forward	20589	32739	32964	20142	16994		13752	
12	Total fixed assets and long term assets	150264	150264	150264	150264	150264		?	
13	Total borrowing	0	0	0	0	0		0	
14	Trust fund disclosure note	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A		N/A	
	Potential unlawful payments (estimate)	0	224	2570	17742	7693		5732	33961

2482 Finance Report

2482a Account Debits

Date	Description	Amount
09.02.2024	R Mason- Grass Cutting	£3045.00
09.02.2024	PCC- Batemans Hill Salt bin	£216.00
09.02.2024	T Wilson – Village Hall Sim Card	£39.00
15.02.2024	Welsh Water	£17.00
04.03.2024	SSE – Pavilion	£91.63

2482b Account Credits

Date	Description	Amount
28.02.2024	Ecotricity	£311.30

2482c Account Balances

Date	Description	Amount
05.03.2024	Main Account	£2,286.82
05.03.2024	Deposit Account	£7,074.35
	Total	£9,361.17

2482d Invoices to be agreed for payment

There were no invoices to be agreed for payment.

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2483 Planning Applications

It was questioned if Councillors had viewed the application for Plot 1 opposite Tinkers Fold. It was commented that this had been missed but would be looked into.

2484 Correspondence

All correspondence had been covered in the Clerks report.

2485 Matters for information and discussion at the Chairs discretion

2485a Recruitment of permanent Clerk

Councillors thanked the Clerk for all the support and assistance she had given council during a difficult period and for working to get the Council on the right path. It was asked whether, as the case with the previous clerk had now been closed, could the Council now advertise for a permanent Clerk. It was agreed to proceed with the recruitment of a permanent clerk for the Council and for the role to be advertised.

2485b Rubbish on Batemans Hill

It was commented there was a lot of rubbish thrown on the hill recently, it was confirmed a member of the public cleared the rubbish from the area.

2485c Location of Council AGM

It was commented that there had been a suggestion that the AGM of the Council should be held in the main hall instead of in the meeting room to allow for more members of the public to attend. This was agreed and the Clerk would make the booking.

2485d Plaque for tree at The Cross

The Chair informed members that the Council needed to purchase a plaque for the recently planted tree on The Cross. He showed the council another plaque which had been purchased for Cosheston WI which was approximately £109 for 4 lines of wording. All members agreed to go ahead with this.

2485e Memorial Bench

It was questioned if there had been any progress with the memorial bench down at the creek, it was commented this was in hand.

The meeting closed at 8.23pm

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