



**MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF AXBRIDGE TOWN COUNCIL HELD IN
AXBRIDGE TOWN HALL ON MONDAY 11 DECEMBER 2023**

Meeting commenced: 7.30p.m.

Meeting concluded: 9.12p.m.

Present: Councillor Mitton (Mayor), Page (Deputy Mayor), Browne, Ham, Jenkins, Jordan, Mearns, Taylor and Thomas

Also in attendance: Mrs V Brice (Town Clerk) and County Councillor Ferguson (for part of the meeting).

124.23 Apologies for Absence – no apologies had been received.

125.23 Draft Minutes of the Council Meeting held on 13 November 2023

RESOLVED: that the minutes of the Council meeting held on 13 November 2023 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

126.23 Declarations of Interest and Application for Dispensations

Declarations of Interest: none

Dispensations: no dispensations were needed for the meeting.

127.23 Public Participation - No members of the public were in attendance.

128.23 Reports

ORGANISATIONS	REPORTS
Police	The Council received the crime statistics for November, noted the staffing changes and passed on its best wishes to PCSO Bonnell.
Somerset Councillor Ham	Somerset Councillor Ham drew attention to the recent budget consultation email, which would be forwarded to members.
Somerset Councillor Ferguson	Somerset Councillor Ferguson gave an update on Somerset Council's financial position. He was pleased to confirm that the 126 bus from Wells to Weston-super-Mare would be in place from 2 January 2024, with the £2 fare in place until December 2024.

129.23 Written Reports – Outside Bodies

Members received a report on behalf of the Axbridge and District Museum Trust following their meeting on 21 November 2023 and a brief update on the work of the Axe Valley Men's Shed.

130.23 Planning

a) Planning and Licences Committee meeting – 27 November 2023

Members received the draft minutes of the meeting held on 27 November 2023. The meeting held just before Council had considered an application for tree works and alterations to the mast at Fry's Hill.

131.23 Administration and Finance

a) Report of the Chairman

The group had not met since the last meeting. The Chairman drew attention to the asset and services devolution spreadsheet which would enable the Council to respond to Somerset Council highlighting which areas it may/may not be interested in taking on/contributing to (see minute 137/23)

b) Somerset Playing Fields Association

This membership was due for renewal with a minimum cost of £15.00. This Association carried out the play area inspection on behalf of the Council.

RESOLVED: that a membership fee of £15 be paid to the Somerset Playing Fields Association.

c) Society of Local Council Clerks

The Clerk's membership of the Society of Local Council's was due for renewal at a cost of £229. Members also previously agreed membership for the Assistant Clerk, so both officers could attend events and training at the membership rates, but this had never been processed. The cost of the Assistant Clerk would be £144 for the annual subscription plus a £10 joining fee.

RESOLVED: that the Clerk's membership be renewed and the Assistant Clerk join the Society with an annual subscription accordingly (combined cost £383).

d) Monthly Financial Report

Members received a monthly financial report for December 2023 setting out the payments for ratification and authorisation. The invoice from the solicitors for the lease work for Old Station Building had been in line with expectations and had been authorised for payment at the last meeting.

The financial report also included the receipts received and direct debit and standing orders payments made during November 2023. The Clerk advised that the Npower invoice for the car park lighting had increased and that this would be monitored with a view to amending the authorised direct debit payment to reflect this higher payment if necessary.

RESOLVED:

- 1) that the list of payment of invoices be ratified and approved (Appendix A) and that the invoice from the Town Maintenance Contractor for work undertaken in November be paid upon receipt as long as it is in line with the contract; and
- 2) that the Direct Debit and Standing Order payments for November 2023 be ratified and the receipts for November 2023 noted (Appendix A)

e) Children's Air Ambulance

The Clerk had received correspondence seeking support for the Children's Air Ambulance.

RESOLVED: that the Council invite the representative to meet with members prior to a council meeting.

132.23 Highways Advisory Group

a) Report of the Highways Advisory Group – November 2023

Members received the report of the group updating on the last meeting. The key items are set out below. The report included a proposed reply to a resident in relation to parking in Axbridge and the Clerk was asked to respond accordingly.

b) Somerset Bus Partnership

Members noted that there would be a full bus service from Wells to Weston-super-Mare from 2 January 2024. The Clerk would ensure that the two residents raising concerns about transport availability to Weston-super-Mare were aware of this service. There was no need to pursue this further with Westlink.

Members still wished to donate to the Somerset Bus Partnership to assist with the printing of decals promoting the £2 fare to encourage bus usage and hoped to display these on the local bus shelters.

RESOLVED: that a donation of £100 be made to Somerset Bus Partnership to assist with the promotion of the £2 fare scheme.

c) Town Car Park signs, Defibrillator signs and Reservoir

The Town Car Park signs had been vandalised – with the parking time permitted hours having been burnt off. The Council considered the options to repair/replace the signage and clarification would be sought on the cost of each option. It was also proposed that an additional sign be purchased to draw attention to Axbridge Town Car Park being a free car park (sign to include the name of the car park as well as 48 hours free parking) to be placed on the existing entrance post.

The cost of the defibrillator signs would be £22 each. Members did not feel it was necessary to look at additional signage for the reservoir – as the situation had improved – but this would continue to be monitored.

RESOLVED: that the Clerk, in consultation with the Chairman, be delegated to arrange for the repair/works to the car park signs to be undertaken using the most cost-effective method to enable this matter to be progressed; and that the additional car park sign and two defibrillator signs be purchased.

d) Town Gateway Sign

Members considered a quote for a double-sided sign and fixing to provide a Gateway sign at the cheddar end of Axbridge. Posts would also be needed and quotes for these could be obtained. It was hoped that the appropriate road markings could be included in the next Traffic Regulation Order. Members discussed the proposed location of the sign at the end of Cheddar Road – in the proximity of the grass bank as you leave the bypass and drive into Axbridge.

RESOLVED: that the purchase of the gateway signage be agreed for installation at the top end of Cheddar Road and that further costings be obtained in terms of the

post(s) – with contact being made with Traffic Management regarding the posts and road markings.

e) Highways Matters

Speed Indicator Device – a meeting would be arranged with the organiser of the Speed Watch Group to discuss the proposals for Speed Indicator Devices

Flooding – Bypass at the top of Wood Lane and at Townsend (middle of gyratory system) – these areas had previously been raised and the recent flooding issues had been flagged up with Somerset Council departments. The camber of the road at Townsend also exacerbated these issues.

Pothole A371 – a pothole just before the cemetery entrance on the A371 had been reported to Somerset Council.

133.23 Cemeteries, Allotments and Open Spaces Group

a) Report of the Group – December 2023

Members received the report from the Chairman following the last group meeting updating on the allotments, cemetery and open spaces matters.

b) Open Spaces Matter - none

134.23 Leisure and Recreation

a) Report of the Chairman

The group had not met since the last meeting. The Chairman reported that the water for the drinking fountain had been turned off temporarily given the cold weather and issues with the tap.

b) Play Area and Public Conveniences Logs

The logs were not available, but inspections were taking place with visual checks of all equipment. The light over the public conveniences was being addressed.

c) Town Maintenance Contractor

The Town Maintenance Contractor had not submitted a report in time for the meeting. This would be presented to the next meeting of Council.

135.23 Personnel and Protocol Committee

a) Draft minutes of the meeting held on 27 November 2023

Members received the draft minutes of the meeting held on 27 November 2023. The Clerk advised that the Sergeant at Mace had reluctantly resigned due to a change in his personal circumstances. The Clerk would thank him, on behalf of the Council, for his support in this role and the post would be advertised in due course.

b) Mayor's Chain

Members considered a recommendation from the Group to agree, in principle, proposed works to the chain which was in need of repair and extension. The proposed

design would create a 3inch diameter collar (forming a ring), allowing for two complete chains with bars – greatly extending the life of the chain. It was proposed that a formal quote be obtained from the local company - being a specialist contractor who had previously undertaken works on the chain at a reasonable cost - with a view to refurbishing the chain in the New Year.

RESOLVED: that a quote for the proposed works to the chain be obtained accordingly.

c) Facilities Manager

The Committee had proposed that the Facilities Manager be line managed by the Town Clerk which would formalise the structure. There will still be liaison with the appropriate Committee chairman.

RESOLVED: that the Facilities Manager be line managed by the Town Clerk.

136.23 Joint meeting of the Town Council and Town Trust

The Mayor gave a brief update on the meeting including matters relating to the administration of The Square and up-grades to facilities in the Town Hall. The Trust would be happy to assist with the storage of the new maces.

137.23 Draft Budget and Precept 2024/25

The Council had previously considered and approved the budget and precept with a precept of £130,000 (being a 17.12% increase) subject to a further revision of the budget and precept should the Council wish to provide or finance any services during the next financial year that are currently provided by Somerset Council. The financial position of Somerset Council, and associated information to date, was noted.

The deadline for submission of the precept had been extended to noon on 2 February 2023 which would give the Council a further opportunity to consider the budget and precept at the January 2024 meeting.

Members considered the draft response to Somerset Council indicating which assets and services it may be interested in either providing or contributing to. Information on costings was still being provided. The Town Council had acquired, or had a long lease, on a number of assets in the Town already, so whilst small areas of land may be of interest this would not have a great impact on the budget. The reduction in services that Somerset Council currently provided would have a greater impact on the community. Members were also mindful of the cost of living to its residents.

Members considered the various areas of services/assets which may be open for some kind of devolution and would respond indicating which services it may well be interested (or not) in taking forward. Two areas of specific concern were verge cutting (it was likely Somerset Council would only be able to undertake highways safety related works) and maintenance of the churchyard. The Local Community Networks were looking at service and asset devolution – which would facilitate joint parish working including, for example, a Highways Steward scheme.

RESOLVED:

1) that the Clerk seeks a quote for the grass cutting of all verges and amenity land in Axbridge to give an indication of the likely costs involved, should the council wish to take this service on;

2) that the Council further considers this matter at its next meeting to see whether the budget and precept request needs to be revised to enable the provision of, or contribution to, services such as grass cutting and to finalise the budget and precept requirement accordingly.

138.23 General Correspondence and Diary Dates

Members received the correspondence page and noted the following correspondence in particular:

Somerset Rivers Authority Draft Strategy and Flood Action Plan
Keep Britain Tidy – Save Pennies and Protect the Planet Campaign

The diary dates are as follows:

Date	Meeting	Time	Venue
Monday 11 Dec	Planning and Licences Council	7pm 7.30pm	Axbridge Town Hall Axbridge Town Hall
	Admin and Finance (TBC)		
Monday 8 Jan	Planning and Licences Council	TBC 7.30pm	Axbridge Town Hall Axbridge Town Hall
	Strategic Planning	TBC	
Monday 22 Jan	Personnel and Protocol Planning and Licences – if needed Highways	TBC (likely 6.45) TBC (likely 7.30) TBC (likely 8pm)	
Santa in Square	16 December 2023		

139.23 Exclusion for Press and Public

RESOLVED: that, in view of the special nature of the business about to be transacted which contains personal information about individuals, it is advisable in the public interest that the press and public be temporarily excluded and they are instructed to withdraw.

140.23 CONFIDENTIAL ITEM – Civic Award and Young Person’s Award

Members considered the nominations received for the both the Civic and Young Person’s Awards.

RESOLVED: that a Civic Award be presented to the individual shown as number 4 on the list and a Youth Award be presented to the individual shown as number Y1 on the list, at the Civic Service to be held on 3 March 2024 (subject to their acceptance).

 Chairman

 Date

Appendix A

Agenda Item Payments for Ratification and Authorisation - December 2023			
8.4a			
Voucher No	Supplier	Description	Total
294	Amazon (to ratify)	Office supplies	£43.96
311	Somerset Council	Bin emptying & public conven. cleaning contract 6mth	£5,987.34
312	Greenslades Grounds Maintenance	Grass cutting - Furlong	£172.80
313	PATA UK	Payroll - service	£63.45
314	Payroll - December (included backdated pay & assoc. costs -since April 2023	Staff salaries and assoc. payroll organisations	£6,601.38
315	Clarke Willmott LLP (agreed at prev meeting)	Old Station Building - Legal fees	£4,132.20
	TOTAL		£17,001.13

N.B. Powers for spending: Axbridge Town Council has the General Power of Competence

Agenda Item 8.4c Direct Debit and Standing Order Payments - November 2023					
Voucher No	Supplier	Description	Net	VAT	Total
277	Somerset Council	Business Rates - Town Car Park	£104.00	£0.00	£104.00
278	Somerset Council	Business Rates - Moorland Street Car Park	£120.00	£0.00	£120.00
279	O2	Telephone - Assistant Clerk	£15.63	£3.13	£18.76
280	Vodafone	Telephone - Clerk contract	£13.34	£2.67	£16.01
281	Vodafone	Telephone - Clerk Device Plan	£12.50	£2.50	£15.00
282	Zoom	Video Conferencing	£12.99	£0.00	£12.99
283	BT	Broadband	£18.95	£3.79	£22.74
285	Npower	Electricity - Moorland St Car Park	£12.79	£0.64	£13.43
286	SSE Southern Electric	Electricity - Town Car Park	£7.90	£0.40	£8.30
287	SSE Southern Electric	Electricity - Public Conveniences	£0.00	£0.00	£0.00
288	SSE Southern Electric	Electricity - Changing Rooms	£30.48	£1.52	£32.00
289	Water2Business	Water and Sewerage - Public Conveniences	£54.50	£0.00	£54.50
290	Water2Business	Sewerage - Town Car Park	£10.22	£0.00	£10.22
291	Water2Business	Sewerage - Moorland Street Car Park	£10.22	£0.00	£10.22
292	Water2Business	Water and Sewerage - Changing Rooms	£30.50	£0.00	£30.50
295	Somerset Council	Business Rates - Council Office	£51.00	£0.00	£51.00
	TOTAL				£199.97

Agenda item 8.4b Receipts November 2023				
Voucher	Date	Customer	Description	Total
78	02.11.2023	Plot 5D	Allotment rent	£5.00
79	02.11.2023	Plusnet	Broadband	£33.20
77	09.11.2023	Plot 8A	Allotment rent and deposit	£47.50
80	09.11.2023	HMRC VAT	VAT repayment	£1,271.47
81	09.11.2023	Lloyds Bank	Bank Interest	£92.38
82	29.11.2023	C V Gower Funeral Directors Ltd	Cemetery fees	£240.00
83	30.11.2023	Lloyds Bank - savings	Bank Interest	£33.56
			Total	£1,723.11