

**WHIMPLE PARISH COUNCIL
MINUTES OF THE PARISH COUNCIL ANNUAL MEETING HELD ON
MONDAY 19 MAY 2025, 7pm**

Present: Cllr Denise Dearden
Cllr Todd Olive
Cllr Sarah Johnson
Cllr Lynda Patrick
Cllr Angela Trimblett

Also present: Amy Tregellas (Parish Clerk)

There were seven members of the public present.

1. Election of Chair for the 2025/26 Municipal Year

The Council **RESOLVED** to election Cllr Denise Dearden as the Chair of the Council for the 2025/26 Municipal Year.

(Proposed Cllr Olive; seconded Cllr Johnson)

2. To receive the Chair's Declaration of Acceptance of Office

Cllr Dearden read out her Declaration of Acceptance of Office and duly signed the declaration.

3. Election of Vice-Chair for the 2025/26 Municipal Year

The Council **RESOLVED** to election Cllr Jo Yarwood as the Vice-Chair of the Council for the 2025/26 Municipal Year.

(Proposed Cllr Dearden; seconded Cllr Johnson)

4. To receive the Vice-Chair's Declaration of Acceptance of Office

As Cllr Yarwood was not present at the meeting the Declaration of Acceptance of Office will be made at the start of the next meeting.

5. Apologies for absence

Apologies were received and accepted from Cllrs Yarwood and Lawrence.

6. Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

7. Public Participation

Mr Tim Adkins raised issues regarding the Grove Road Allotments and the fact that there is rubbish and debris down near the boundary with the riverbank, primarily left by allotment holders that leave their rubbish when they quit the allotment. Mr Adkins said that he felt a co-ordinated approach was needed between the Council and volunteers to deal with this problem.

The Parish Clerk confirmed that she and Cllr Trimblett had visited both allotment sites that morning and were giving a report later in the agenda.

Mrs Becky Venton spoke about the Council's Play Area project and stated that she had safeguarding concerns about the play area being in Town Lane due to the site being enclosed and isolated.

The Council confirmed that at the 22 April meeting, that the Council had listened to the views of members of the public and the decision was taken that the Play Equipment would be located in the Parish Field. Town Lane would be turned into a community/mindfulness garden.

Several members of the public wished to speak regarding agenda item 11v. the Shed in the Parish Field.

Mr Malcolm Randall gave some history regarding the shed, stating that WACY had decided to build a shed in the Parish Field. Originally it was a small shed but it had been adapted over time. The idea is to remove the old shed and replace it with a larger shed. The group of volunteers have been accused of stealing the shed and are very upset. This is due to the actions of one councillor sending an inappropriate email to one of the volunteers. The group are unhappy with the actions of one councillor rather than the Council as a whole. He asked what the Council would be doing to deal with the councillor.

Mrs Becky Venton said that as a member of the village there is an appreciation for volunteers, and they work they do to make the village nice, and also the organisation of Whimple Fest. Nobody wants to lose the goodwill of the volunteers. There are ways of doing things and the action of the councillor was not the correct way to go about things. She asked why the shed appeared in the Council's asset register at the full value WACY paid for it, rather than being depreciated.

Mrs Sheril Olive stated that Cllr Lawrence's actions had been inappropriate from start to finish and acting as a representative of the Council was completely wrong. She asked if complaints could be made by other people as well as the individual who had received the email.

Mr Tim Adkins asked for clarification on a practical issue regarding the new shed, in terms of ownership. The shed and the contents belong to the village and are there as a resource. The asset is not being created for an individual or a group but for the benefit of the village. Should the asset be on the Council's asset register and covered by the Council's insurance. Could community groups make a small financial donation to Whimple Fest for using the shed or equipment. Mr Adkins also stated that Whimple Fest may not continue if the number of volunteers reduces.

Mr Steve Venton said that the principle is to have a good volunteer base in the village which the Parish Council has supported and enabled that in the past. Regarding this matter, there is concern regarding the perception of the Council in the wider community and this having a negative impact on the image of the Council.

Mrs Marianne Randall confirmed that she had sourced the previous shed and purchased it on behalf of WACY. The old shed contained strimmers and mowers as well as the equipment for the village day

Mr Chris Olive confirmed that Whimple Fest used to be called Village week. He also said that there had been a breakdown in communication within the Council and that this was a deliberate and wilful attack on a member of the public by one councillor.

Mr Tim Adkins stated that he felt there were two issues in this case. Firstly, the personal interaction between the member of the public and Cllr Lawrence, which he felt needed to be dealt with between the two parties. Secondly, the wider problem regarding the individual not working with the Council as a whole, and how this is dealt with.

The Clerk advised that a complaint had been received by the Council from the individual that had received the email. As this relates to the behaviour and conduct of a councillor, this has to be dealt with by the Monitoring Officer at East Devon District Council. The Clerk contacted the Monitoring Officer and was advised that the Parish Council should not be taking any action whilst this goes through the formal process.

The Clerk also advised on the issues around the old and new shed. Parish Council finance does not depreciate assets and there is a question as to whether any value should have been listed on the asset register, due to the fact that it was gifted to the Council. If the Council is asked to insure it, then it would become responsible for the shed and the contents. This needs to be thought about in more detail and unpicked. The Clerk also asked if Whimble Fest has a bank account (it was confirmed that they do) so potentially they would be able to source their own insurance for the shed and its contents.

All councillors stated that they were unhappy with the actions of one councillor and that didn't represent the Council as a whole. Councillors thanked the group for coming along to the meeting and giving more information regarding the whole picture, as many people didn't know the history of the shed. Councillors also expressed a view that they wish to draw a line under this situation and to start afresh.

Cllr Dearden concluded the discussion by stating that the Council will work with volunteers to ensure that Whimble Fest takes place this year. Then representatives from the Council and Whimble Fest group should sit down and discuss the way forward in terms of the ownership and control of the new shed and whether it should be on the Council asset register and insurance.

Cllr Dearden also stated that she was very grateful that the group had come to speak to the Council and confirmed that the Council supports and appreciates the work of volunteers in the village. She said the Council was extremely sorry about what has happened. She appreciates the comments about the Council not working as a team but the complaint needs to go through the process at EDDC.

All members of the public left the meeting at this point.

8. Minutes of the previous meeting of Whimble Parish Council

The Council **RESOLVED** to approve the minutes of the Whimble Parish Council Meeting held on Tuesday 22 April 2025.

(proposed by Cllr Dearden; seconded by Cllr Olive)

9. District and County Councillor reports:

East Devon District Council (EDDC) Councillor report

Cllr Olive gave a verbal update to the meeting, some of the points had been made at the Annual Parish Meeting. Cllr Olive's report provided updates on:

- EDDC Local Plan. The Government seems to be amending the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) on an annual basis. The last update at the end of 2024 made substantial changes to national policy and potentially impacts on EDDC's Local Plan (by potentially needing to allocate between 200-300 more homes in the Emerging Plan). However, there is a period of transition and EDDC is trying to take advantage of this.
- In terms of the second new community in EDDC, the Council plans to take a more active leadership role than it did with Cranbrook to learn from previous mistakes. There will also be significant work on masterplanning the new community.
- There have been significant improvements to the EDDC Housing Services including the turnaround time for void properties being reduced.

- At the EDDC Annual Meeting last week some changes were made to the Cabinet but Cllr Olive is still on the Cabinet.
- EDDC will be contacting Parish Councils to ask them questions regarding rural broadband.

Devon County Council (DCC) Councillor Report

Councillors were advised that Iain Chubb lost his seat in the DCC elections and the new DCC Councillor is Cllr Cathy Connor. Cllr Connor was not in attendance (due to illness) and had not sent a report.

10. Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) in Devon

There was no real update on LGR, other than to say that the County Council, Unitary Councils and District Councils had submitted a number of expressions of interest proposals to the Secretary of State in March 2025. Of all of the areas in the Country going through LGR, Devon submitted the most proposals. As it is complex, the Secretary of State may leave Devon until last or may decide to impose one model (or potentially one large Unitary Council) on Devon. More detailed plans are now being drawn up for each of the potential options and are to be submitted in November 2025.

11. Environment & Community

i) Community Speed Watch initiative

The Clerk read out information provided by Cllr Lawrence. At the time of the meeting, 10 Community Speed Watch trials had been completed, and 20 drivers were identified that were found to be driving over the speed limit. The drivers of those vehicles will have received a letter from the Police. One driver made an obscene gesture and has had a visit from the Traffic Police.

ii) To receive an update on the Play Area Project (Parish Field)

There was no update on this project. The Clerk is setting up a date for the first meeting of the Member Working Group. They will consider the information coming forward from the play equipment suppliers.

iii) To receive an update on the Town Lane Project

There was no update on this project. The Clerk confirmed that this will be considered by the Member Working Group. The deadline for quotations for the work to clear out the old furniture and cutting back the trees at the Town Lane site is Friday 23 May 2025 at 12 noon.

iv) Village Maintenance Schedule

Councillors raised the fact that the padlock for the Parish Field gate has disappeared and asked the Clerk to check as to whether the Grounds Contract had inadvertently taken it away with them after cutting the grass.

Councillors also raised a complaint from a resident whose property backs onto the Parish Field, in that the Grounds Maintenance contractor lifts off the gate in the Parish Field from its hinges and props it against the resident's fence. Councillors asked the Clerk to ask the contractor to stop removing the gate from the hinges and propping it against the resident's fence.

v) Shed in the Parish Field

The Clerk read out an email from Cllr Lawrence (who had asked that his comments be recorded in the minutes):

'On the agenda item relating to the shed in the Parish Field, I should like it minuted that I strongly object to the actions of a member of the Whimblefest Committee aided by the husband of a Parish Councillor in direct contradiction of the motion passed by Whimble Parish Council

(WPC). By taking away the shed without permission, they seriously damaged the chances of WPC being able to sell it for a good price, in keeping with the valuation shown on the Asset Register. Just showing a photograph of the shed, without any reference to measurements, construction etc has meant that we have to agree to a knock down price, not its true value. You informed us that Glenn Starkey had said that a Parish Councillor had given them permission. In the interest of openness and transparency I think it is imperative for Councillors to be given the identity of that Councillor who feels that he/she has the authority to override a Council decision.'

Discussion took place around

- Councillors did not agree with the comments made by Cllr Lawrence in his email and agreed to take no further action in relation to the shed and to draw a line under the matter
- The Clerk confirmed that as per the resolution made at the 22 April 2025 meeting she had advertised the shed on Facebook asking for offers to be submitted to the Council by 12 noon on Tuesday 13 May 2025.
- The Clerk confirmed that one offer of £100 had been received for the old shed in the Parish Field.
- Given the information provided by the public during public participation and given that the Council had not paid anything for the shed (and it had likely been incorrectly recorded in the asset register), whether it was appropriate to accept any money for the shed.
- If agreeing to accept the offer of £100, whether the money should be added to the earmarked reserve for the Play Area Project so it is spent on the local community.

The Council **RESOLVED** that it would not accept any money for the shed and that item is listed as scrap on the Council's Asset Register.

(moved Cllr Patrick; seconded Cllr Trimblett)

vi) Quotations for works to the Parish Car Park

The Clerk outlined the key points from her report on the quotations that had been received for the works in the Parish Car Park:

- A call was made for suppliers to get in touch with the Council on the Council and Whimble What's On Facebook pages.
- As a result of this several contractors expressed an interest in quoting for the work
- The Clerk sent them a specification for the works and confirmed that the deadline for quotes was 12 noon on Tuesday 13 May 2025.
- Five suppliers had quoted for the work with prices listed as:
 - Supplier 1 = £475 plus VAT
 - Supplier 2 = £314
 - Supplier 3 = £580 plus VAT
 - Supplier 4 = £600 plus VAT
 - Supplier 5 = £1,400 plus VAT
- One additional quote was received but because it arrived after the deadline the Council could not consider it.
- Suppliers 1, 3, 4 and 5 had the requested Public Liability Insurance of £5m, however supplier 2 only had £1m.

Discussion took place around:

- Why the Council had asked for £5m Public Liability Insurance (response is because it is the standard amount set by insurers)
- The need to advise the individuals that park in the Car Park that they will need to move their cars out whilst the works are completed. This will be communicated through the next

edition of Whimble News, on Facebook, on the Council website and by popping notices on car windscreens.

- To make sure that the successful supplier leaves the bar for the car park, which is currently laid on the floor
- To ask Billy Bloomfield to reinstate the bar plus padlock once the works have been completed.

The Council **RESOLVED** to appoint Devon Arborists (Supplier 1) to carry out the works in the Parish Car Park as set out in the specification document.

(moved Cllr Johnson; seconded Cllr Dearden)

vii) Any other arising environment and community issues

There were no matters arising.

12. Allotments

The Clerk provided councillors with copies of drawings with details of the plots for Grove Road and Heberton Close and confirmed that she visited both sites this morning with Cllr Trimblett to carry out an inspection.

The key points were:

Grove Road

- The communal paths were in a good condition with the grass being cut
- There were nettles and overgrown foliage around some of the boundaries to the allotments
- The map of the plots held by the Council looks nothing like the layout of the allotments so the Clerk had drawn a new layout map.
- Only one two plots were numbered
- About half of the plots were well tended and looked after
- The other half of the plots were overgrown and untidy.
- Plot 2B had recently become vacant with the tenant quitting at the end March 2025.
- Plots 6A1 and 6A2 were both vacant and it was unclear as to how the two plots are split

Heberton Close

- The communal paths were in a good condition with the grass being cut
- At the far end of the site, in the communal area where the trees are planted, the grass is extremely overgrown with it practically at waist height. There are also weeds and brambles mixed in with the grass
- The map of the plots held by the Council looks nothing like the layout of the allotments so the Clerk had drawn a new layout map
- Only one or two plots numbered
- The plot numbers were all over the place but luckily one of the allotment holders helped work out which plot was which.
- There were a small number of well tended and looked after plots.
- The rest of the plots were overgrown
- Plots 6, 7, 12, 14 and 16 are all vacant
- Plots 3, 5, 7 and 9 all looked to be neglected and were significantly overgrown

Discussion took place around:

- Obtaining quotes for cutting back the brambles, grass and overgrown foliage in the communal areas at sites

- The need to add these areas to the Grounds Maintenance schedule when it goes out to tender for the next financial year
- The Clerk to write to allotment holders for the plots that are untidy and overgrown to ask them to rectify the situation, as they are currently in breach of the Allotments Policy.
- Vacant Plots – the Clerk to liaise with people on the waiting list to invite them to view the vacant plots. If they wish to take on the allotment and clear it themselves to offer them 12 months rent free. If they want the Council to clear the plot, then quotes to be obtained to carry out the clearance work. Once cleared the plot should be covered to prevent regrowth of weeds
- That delegated authority should be given to the Clerk to obtain quotes from contractors if the prospective tenant does not wish to clear the allotment themselves, with quotes coming to the next available Council meeting.

The Council **RESOLVED** that:

- a) Quotes are obtained from contractors for cutting back the brambles, overgrown foliage and grass in the communal areas at the Grove Road and Heberton Close Allotments
- b) When the Grounds Maintenance Contract is market tested for the 2026/27 financial year, to ensure that regular cutting of the communal areas is included in the works specification
- c) People on the waiting list are invited to view the vacant plots and decide if:
 - a. They agree to 12 months rent free to clear the plot themselves; or
 - b. They don't wish to clear the plot themselves the Clerk is given delegated authority to obtain quotes for the clearance work to be completed (to bring forward to the next Council meeting)

(moved Cllr Johnson; seconded Cllr Olive)

13. Neighbourhood Plan

Cllr Olive confirmed that he and the Clerk had met with officers at EDDC regarding the Whimble Neighbourhood Plan and provided the following update:

- The Council had previously given the Clerk and Cllr Olive delegated authority to obtain quotes for the cost of Masterplanning the two potential sites in the EDDC Emerging Local Plan (i.e. Whim_11 and Whim_08a)
- Having an allocation for affordable housing in the Whimble Neighbourhood Plan will give the Plan more weight in terms of EDDC planning applications.
- The need to contact the site owners for the five amber sites that the Council agreed to investigate further in terms of an affordable housing allocation (Whim_03, Whim_07, Whim_13, Whim_18 and Whim_20). The purpose of this is to see if they are open to 100% affordable housing allocation on their land, plus also to be given access to their land to carry out the landscape assessment.
- The need to liaise with the EDDC Affordable Housing Officer to talk about potential schemes for affordable homes or a Community Land Trust
- The need to liaise with the flooding expert at the Environment Agency in respect of the potential allocation sites
- The need to consult informally with Devon County Highways regarding accessibility issues for the potential allocation sites
- That a landscaping assessment is completed for the potential sites using the EDDC landscape methodology
- The EDDC Neighbourhood Planning Officer is writing a paper to screen if the Parish Council needs to undertake a Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA). It is almost certain that this piece of work will need to be completed. If this is the case then an application will be made for Government funding in July, when the funding window potentially reopens.

- To involve the community and take them along with the Council, it is suggested that a small Advisory Panel of 4 people is set up to include the lead councillors for Planning and the Neighbourhood Plan plus two members of the public.

The Council **RESOLVED** that it would:

- a) Contact site owners to explore if they are open to a 100% affordable housing allocation and to ask for permission to access their land to complete the landscape assessment.
- b) Set up an Advisory Group consisting of 4 people (the Councillors leading in terms of Planning and Neighbourhood Planning plus two members of the public)

(moved Cllr Dearden; seconded Cllr Trimblett)

14. Planning

i) To consider Planning Applications relating to Land South of Lily Cottage, Exeter Road, Whimble

- a) 21/2430/ADV – Installation of 12 fascia signs and 8 projecting signs
- b) 21/2429/ADV – Installation of a freestanding totem sign
- c) 21/2428/ADV – Installation of 4 freestanding signs, 2 banner units and 21 dot signs
- d) 21/2427/ADV – Installation of 6 fascia signs, 3 booth lettering signs and 1 x 15 inch digital booth screen

The Council considered all four applications together and there was no discussion on the applications.

The Council **RESOLVED** that it has no objection to applications 21/2430/ADV, 21/2429/ADV, 21/2428/ADV and 21/2427/ADV.

(moved Cllr Dearden; seconded Cllr Johnson)

15. Finance

i) Summary receipts and payments for 2025/26 to 30 April 2025

The Clerk confirmed that two receipts had been received into the current account in April, which were the first part of the Precept (£14,221.50) and the VAT reclaim for 2024/25 (£1,449.83). Community Infrastructure Levy (£886.08) had been received into the savings account and then transferred to the Town Lane Project earmarked reserve (as resolved at the 22 April 2025 meeting).

The Council **RESOLVED** to approve the summary of receipts and payments to 30 April 2025
(Proposed Cllr Dearden; seconded Cllr Olive)

ii) Unity Bank current account reconciliation as at the end April 2025

The Council **RESOLVED** to approve the Unity Bank current account reconciliation to end April 2025

(Proposed Cllr Dearden; seconded Cllr Olive)

iii) Unity Bank savings account reconciliation as at the end April 2025

The Council **RESOLVED** to approve the Unity Bank savings account reconciliation to end April 2025

(Proposed Cllr Dearden; seconded Cllr Olive)

iv) To approve the scheduled of payments for May 2025 totalling £1,702.63, which included payments for:

Whimble Victory Hall hire April 2025 = £12.50

Billy Bloomfield (repair of the Whimble sign and flowerbed) = £125.00

Source for Business Water; Grove Road Allotments 17/10/24 to 14/04/25 = £10.46

Source for Business Water; Recreation Ground 18/01/25 to 30/04/25 = £26.98
Pro Lawn grass cutting session 09/05/25 = £336.00
Tom Hobson, Internal Auditor = £125.00
Clerk salary; May 2025 = £781.33
HMRC PAYE and Employers NIC; May 2025 = £279.36
Unity Trust Bank service charge 01/04/25 to 30/04/25 = £6.00

The Council **RESOLVED** to approve the schedule of payments for May 2025.
(*proposed Cllr Dearden; seconded Cllr Olive*)

v) Budget Monitoring Report 2025/26 as at end March 2025

The Council **RESOLVED** to note the budget monitoring report as at end April 2025
(*Proposed by Cllr Dearden; seconded by Cllr Olive*)

vi) Update on Reserves

The Clerk provided an update on reserves and confirmed that she had made the changes that were resolved at the 22 April 2025 meeting. The total amount in earmarked reserves is £57,535.16, split as follows:

- Village Maintenance = £5,000.000
- Neighbourhood Plan = £7,500.00
- Elections = £1,100.00
- Play Area Project (Parish Field) = £35,549.08
- Locality Budget = £500.00
- Town Lane Project = £7,886.08

The Clerk recommended that money should be moved from the Current Account to the Savings Account to make the Savings Account balance up to £57,535.16. This would give an interest rate of 2.25% (currently) compared to 0% interest rate on the current account.

The Council **RESOLVED** to move £21,100 from the Current Account into the Savings Account so that the total for earmarked reserves is held in the savings account and a better rate of interest is received.

(*moved Cllr Dearden; seconded Cllr Olive*)

vii) Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) Statement for the 2024/25 financial year

Councillors considered the CIL statement for 2024/25 which set out that the Council received £20,243.55 CIL funding in 2024/25. When added to the carry forward balance of £4,844.97 this gave a closing balance of £25,088.52. No CIL money was spent in 2024/25. The funding was added to the earmarked reserve for the Play Area Project.

The Council **RESOLVED** to approve the CIL Statement for the 2024/25 financial year
(*moved Cllr Dearden; seconded Cllr Olive*)

viii) Financial Report for the 2024/25 financial year

Councillors considered the financial report for the 2024/25 financial year. This set out details of the Council's income and expenditure in 2024/25. The Council is in a sound financial position. At the end of the financial year the closing balance (i.e. reserves) was £74,696, which is an increase of £26,275 from the previous financial year.

As set out in minute 15vi. money has been put into earmarked reserves to cover village maintenance, further work on the Neighbourhood Plan, the Play Area in the Parish Field and a community/mindfulness garden in Town Lane.

The purpose of the report is to publish it on the Council website so that the Council is being open and transparent about its finances.

The Council **RESOLVED** to approve the Whimble Parish Council Financial Report for the 2024/25 financial year and to publish it on the Council website.
(*moved Cllr Dearden; seconded Cllr Olive*)

ix) 2022/23 VAT Return

The Clerk advised that in the period when the former Clerk left and the Locum Clerk was in post, the VAT return for 2022/23 was not completed. The main reason for this is because the 2021/22 VAT return was not submitted until January 2023 and not paid until May 2023. The assumption was that the money received in May 2023 related to the 2022/23 return.

The Clerk advised that she had gone through all expenditure for the 2022/23 financial year to ensure that VAT invoices were available for all transactions. This had involved searching for invoices and obtaining copies from several companies. The Council also had to obtain several old bank statements as they were missing from the Council records. This had been at a cost of £48 to the Council.

Currently the only invoices missing relate to XLN Telecom who are unwilling to provide the Council with the records due to the former Clerk being the named contract and the account being closed. The Council has to make the choice as to whether to leave these out of the reclaim or whether to write to the company.

To date the total VAT that can be reclaimed is £1,904.34

The Council **RESOLVED** to write to XLN Telecom to ask them to provide the missing VAT invoices. The letter is to be signed by Cllr Dearden as the Chair of the Council.
(*Moved Cllr Dearden; seconded Cllr Olive*)

16. Annual Governance Statement for the 2024/25 financial year

Councillors considered the Annual Governance Statement for the 2024/25 financial year. The Clerk confirmed that she had answered 'no' to the category of the assessment of risk. Whilst the Council's governance arrangements have been strengthened over the last 12 months and key business risks have been considered by the Council there was no formal risk assessment in the 2024/25 financial year. An action plan has been written to accompany the Annual Governance Statement which sets out that the Risk Management Strategy and Risk Assessment are to be approved at the 19 May 2025 meeting. The risk assessment has been added to the Council's forward plan to be reviewed on a quarterly basis.

The Council **RESOLVED** to approve the Annual Governance Statement for the 2024/25 financial year and the accompanying action plan.

(*moved Cllr Dearden; seconded Cllr Olive*)

The Chair and Clerk both signed the Annual Governance Statement

17. Accounting Statements for the 2024/25 financial year

Councillors considered the Accounting Statements for the 2024/25 financial year.

The Clerk advised that there were 15% variances between the 2023/24 and 2024/25 figures which mean explanations must be made to the External Auditor. The Clerk has prepared detailed variance analysis for the categories of total other receipts, staff costs and all other payments. This information will be published on the website.

The Council **RESOLVED** to approve the Accounting Statements for the 2024/25 financial year.

(*Moved Cllr Dearden; seconded Cllr Olive*)

The Chair and Clerk both signed the Accounting Statements

18. Internal Auditor's Report on the Annual Governance and Accountability Return 2024/25

Councillors considered the Internal Auditor's report which covered the work carried out on key internal controls, including Records and Accounting, and Procedures and Processes. The Internal Auditor had also signed the Annual Internal Audit Report page within the Annual Governance and Accountability Return for 2024/25.

Recommendations made by the Internal Auditor were:

- On the historic VAT reclaim I would recommend that the Council is explicit in its want to submit an annual VAT reclaims in a timely manner and should consider referencing when VAT reclaims are made and the time period they cover. It is appropriate in this instance to state that the missed VAT claim occurred prior to the current Clerk and her work has brought it to light.
- In the course of the audit I recommended that Councillors Olive and Lawrence have their declarations published on the Parish Council website. This has been corrected during the course of the audit.

In response to these recommendations the Clerk confirmed that there is a robust process with an audit trail in place for VAT reclaims. Reclaims have already been completed for the 2023/24 and 2024/25 financial years, in April each year. Both reclaims have been paid in full.

In terms of the Register of Interests paperwork, this is held on the EDDC website. The Clerk had tried to hyperlink to them on the Council. However, for some reason this didn't work. This has now been corrected and the Register of Interest forms for all Councillors are available on both the EDDC and Whimpe Parish Council websites.

The Council **RESOLVED** to note the Internal Auditors Report.
(*Moved Cllr Dearden; seconded Cllr Olive*)

19. Standing Orders

Councillors considered the amended Standing Orders, which had been updated to reflect the changes in the National Association of Local Councils (NALC) model Standing Orders 2025. The key changes were to the sections on the Code of Conduct and Financial Controls and Procurement.

The Council **RESOLVED** to approve the Standing Orders.
(*Moved Cllr Johnson; seconded Cllr Patrick*)

20. Financial Regulations

Councillors considered the revised Financial Regulations, which are the NALC model Financial Regulations 2025.

The Council **RESOLVED** to approve the Financial Regulations.
(*Moved Cllr Olive; seconded Cllr Johnson*)

21. Statement on Internal Controls and Internal Control Checklist

Councillors considered the updated Statement on Internal Controls plus the Internal Control Checklist. The Clerk advised that the idea of the Internal Control checklist is that a councillor who is a non-authorised signatory carries out checks on a quarterly basis, which adds to good governance practices. Cllr Trimblett volunteered to be the councillor that would complete the checks on a quarterly basis.

The Council **RESOLVED** to approve the Statement on Internal Controls and Internal Control Checklist, and that Cllr Trimblett be the councillor that will complete quarterly internal control checks.

(Moved Cllr Patrick; seconded Cllr Johnson)

22. Risk Management Strategy

Councillors considered the amended Risk Management Strategy. The Clerk confirmed that two new strategic risks had been added, relating to Local Government Reorganisation in Devon and the Cranbrook Community Governance Review.

The Council **RESOLVED** to approve the Risk Management Strategy

(Moved Cllr Dearden; seconded Cllr Olive)

23. Risk Assessment

Councillors considered the Risk Assessment document. The Clerk explained that the risk assessment had been scheduled in the forward plan to come back to the Council on a quarterly basis, so that existing risks could be considered, as well as any new and emerging risks. Whilst risk had been considered during the 2024/25 financial year, it had not been formally recorded, so the risk assessment improves the Council's risk management arrangements.

The Council **RESOLVED** to approve the Risk Assessment and agreed that it would be reviewed on a quarterly basis.

(Moved Cllr Dearden; seconded Cllr Olive)

24. Insurance Arrangements

Councillors considered the Council's insurance arrangements and agreed that the Policy Schedule is correct and meets the Council's needs. The long terms insurance agreement ends on 31 January 2026. Nearer the time the Clerk will market test insurance and bring a report to the Council.

The Council **RESOLVED** to note that the insurance arrangements are adequate and appropriate and will be reviewed prior to the renewal date.

(moved Cllr Dearden; seconded Cllr Olive)

25. Banking Arrangements and Signatories

The Clerk set out that an annual review of the Council's banking arrangements and authorised signatories is good practice.

Discussion took place around:

- The Unity Trust Bank Current Account is working well and it has made making payments much easier.
- The Council moved its savings account across to Unity Bank during the 2024/25 financial year, and is now getting a much better interest rate (currently 2.25%). Interest is paid quarterly.
- The authorised signatory list needs to be updated. Cllr McArthur is to be removed from the list and a new signatory added so that there are four signatories.

The Council **RESOLVED** to keep its current account and savings account with Unity Trust Bank for the 2025/26 financial year, remove Cllr McArthur from the authorised signatories list and add Cllr Lynda Patrick to the authorised signatories list.

(moved Cllr Dearden; seconded Cllr Johnson)

26. Code of Conduct

Councillors considered the Code of Conduct, which had not been amended since the last update in May 2024.

The Council **RESOLVED** to approve the Code of Conduct
(*moved Cllr Dearden; seconded Cllr Johnson*)

27. Scheme of Delegation

Councillors considered the Scheme of Delegation which set out the roles of the Responsible Financial Officer and Proper Officer (both carried out by the Parish Clerk). The report also included the matters that can only be considered by Full Council.

The Clerk brought a couple of specific delegations to councillors' attention. The first allows the Clerk to make urgent payments to suppliers (after obtaining written permission from the Chair and/or Vice-Chair) in the event of a meeting being inquorate and not able to transact any business or during the summer recess.

The second relates to planning applications and submitting comments on applications where the deadline for a response is before the date of the next Parish Council meeting. This would only be done following consultation with all councillors. It is anticipated that this would only happen in exceptional circumstances.

The Council **RESOLVED** to approve the Scheme of Delegation
(*moved Cllr Olive; seconded Cllr Patrick*)

28. Councillor Responsibilities

Councillors considered the list of roles and responsibilities, and agreed to the following:

Area of responsibility (lead councillor/champion)

Allotments (including inspections) – Cllr Trimblett

Community Speed Watch – deferred until the next meeting

Planning – Cllr Yarwood

Neighbourhood Plan – Cllr Olive

Finance, Internal Control & Risk Management – Cllr Trimblett

Snow Warden/Road Warden – Cllr Trimblett

Footpath Warden – Cllr Johnson

Play Area (including inspections) – Cllr Patrick

Emergency Plan – deferred until the next meeting

Outside Appointments

OSM Locality Health & Care Team – Cllr Yarwood

Whimble Victory Hall Committee – Cllr Patrick

The Council **RESOLVED** to approve the appointments set out above and to publish them on the website.

(*moved Cllr Trimblett; seconded Cllr Patrick*)

29. Cranbrook Community Governance Review

The Clerk provided an update on the Cranbrook Community Governance Review (CGR). The timetable set out in the EDDC Council report suggested that the first round of consultation should be taking place between March and June 2025. However, no information had been received from EDDC.

This had been chased up with EDDC and a response from the Monitoring Officer's Team advised that 'A more formal update is in the process of being prepared for circulation. However,

in the meantime, to confirm, the consultation has not yet commenced. Whilst the initial timetable planned for it to have been started by now we have experienced some delays and also to have to put things on hold during the pre-election period. Now that the elections are over the consultation documents are in the process of being put together and we are hoping they will be finalised and ready for publishing in the next couple of weeks.'

Cllr Olive (wearing his EDDC hat) confirmed that the review should still be completed by Spring 2026 so that arrangements are in place for the next Town and Parish Council elections in May 2027.

Councillors agreed that this item remain on the agenda whilst the CGR takes place.

30. Forward Plan

The Council noted the Forward Plan, and noted the items coming forward in June, which are:

- Applications for grants and donations
- Grants and donations Policy update
- Financial reports
- Planning applications (if appropriate)
- Community Engagement Policy
- IT Policy
- Roles and responsibilities for Community Speed Watch and the Emergency Plan
- Cranbrook Community Governance Review
- Local Government Reorganisation

Councillors asked that Locality grant application for the Neighbourhood Plan be added to the forward plan for the July meeting.

31. Correspondence

The Council considered the following correspondence:

1. An email from Clare Salter who was keen to be involved in the Town Lane project.
Councillors were very happy for Ms Salter to be involved and asked the Clerk to invite her to the Member Working Group Meetings
2. An email from Cllr Paul Hayward at EDDC regarding a Rural Broadband Survey, which has a deadline of 6 June 2025. It was agreed to add this to the Planning Meeting agenda for the 2 June 2025.
3. An email from Mrs Ackland regarding the overgrown grass at Slewton Crescent, which is the responsibility of Vistry Homes (formerly Bovis). The Clerk confirmed that she had been in touch with the Vistry Customer Service team and they had advised the grass is being cut in the next couple of days, and will then be cut on a regular basis.
4. An email from EDDC regarding consultation on National Landscape Management Plan 2025-2030, which has a closing date of 13 June 2025. It was agreed to add this to the Planning Meeting agenda for the 2 June 2025.
5. An email from former DCC Cllr Chubb saying goodbye and thanking everyone for the work they do for their local communities.
6. An email from Mr Williams regarding ownership of the trees on the stream bank at the bottom of Rectory Close and backing onto Dince Hill Close. Councillors asked the Clerk to go back to Mr Williams to confirm that the trees are on private land and the Council has been trying to contact relatives of Mrs Hansford regarding the trees of this land.
7. An email from Ms Brooks regarding overgrown grass at Whiteway Close Communal Area. Councillors confirmed that this would also fall under the responsibility of Vistry Homes and asked the Clerk to provide her with the update from Vistry Homes.

32. Whimble News Article

Councillors considered the draft article for the next edition of Whimble News and confirmed that they were happy for the Clerk to submit it.

33. Chair's Business

Cllr Dearden thanked each and every councillor for their hard work and positive attitude that they bring to the Council.

The meeting closed at 9.34pm

The next Planning Meetings will be held on Monday 2 June 2025 at 7pm * *A planning meeting will be cancelled if no new planning applications are received by the date that the agenda is published (the Tuesday before the meeting).* The next Parish Council meeting will take place on Monday 16 June 2025 at 7pm.

Signed by Chair:

16/06/2025