

Croscombe Parish Council

Clerk's Report to 18 Oct 23

The external auditor, PKF Littlejohn, came back with more questions on the accounts, this time specifically relating to the budget and staff costs for 2021-22 for comparison with 2022-23. Following the supply of this information the audit was successfully concluded, with the auditor offering no further comments, recommendations or criticisms.

Confirmation was provided to Unity Trust Bank of the Council's budget and eligibility for coverage under the government's Financial Services Compensation Scheme (FSCS). This means that in the event of a failure of the bank the Council would be covered up to the sum of £85,000. There was some confusion around the communication from Unity Trust asking for this confirmation – their email referred to a link which didn't exist – so they were also contacted by phone to confirm the Council is covered.

Following the resignation of Sarah Fawcett from the Council, the Electoral Services Manager (East) of Somerset Council, Steven Lake, was informed. He provided the appropriate notice to advertise the vacancy and invite electors to consider whether they would want a by-election, failing which the Council would seek to fill the post by co-option. The notice was posted on the Council's website and notice boards. There was no request for a by-election, so the vacancy was advertised and candidates invited to apply. The co-option process will take place at the Council meeting on 24th October.

Democratic Services in Somerset Council issued a request to complete a survey into the range of councils adopting the LDA Model Code of Conduct. The Clerk completed the survey on behalf of the Council, confirming adoption of the Code of Conduct.

The Parish Precepts department at Somerset Council sent an email requesting confirmation of the correct communication channels in connection with the precept for 2024-25. The new Clerk contact details were provided and confirmation received from the department that their records had been updated.

A review and update of the Council website was undertaken to take into account the resignation of a councillor, revisions to terms or reference of some working groups and the cancelling of others.

The Clerk attended an online presentation by Somerset Council into the Mendip Local Plan Part II Site Allocations Review. This review was instigated by a judicial review which ruled that sites had to be found for a further 505 houses in north-east Somerset. The sites haven't been identified yet, but the area involved does not include Croscombe. The Mendip Local Plan Parts 1 and 2 can be viewed on the Somerset Council website at:

<https://www.somerset.gov.uk/planning-buildings-and-land/adopted-local-plans/?district=Mendip>

The Clerk attended two brief online courses offered by SALC in October. The first was on Building a Budget, and was offered free, while the second was on VAT for Unregistered Councils.

An email report into a meeting between Shepton Mallet Town Council and Somerset Council was sent to the Clerk by Cllr Matt Harrison of Shepton Mallet. The two key points from this report were that Somerset Council faces severe financial challenges over the next two years and will have to take action to avoid insolvency, and that consequently Somerset Council will not currently undertake to fund flood measures identified by consultants for the former Mendip District Council.

Cllr Martin Lovell of Somerset Council offered to coordinate responses to a proposal to upgrade the radio base station for Vodafone, sited at the sewage works on the edge of the village, since it would serve parishes he represents.

Somerset Council will be undertaking a survey of grit bins prior to refilling them before the winter. The council will be advised if any upgrade or replacement of bins is required.

A risk assessment was updated for the Orchard event scheduled for Sunday, 22nd October, and agreement made with the farmer who rents the field and it would be cleared of sheep and electric fencing in time for the event.