

Croscombe Parish Council

Clerk's Report to 04 Jan 24

Perhaps the most significant development over the past few months with an impact on Croscombe Parish Council is the notification by Somerset Council of its desire and need to devolve assets and services to smaller councils. This has arisen because of the very difficult financial situation the council finds itself in. This was communicated by Bill Revans, the leader of Somerset Council, in early November in a letter highlighting opportunities for smaller councils to become more involved in a number of areas such as Transport, Highways, Waste Services, Schools, Open Spaces, Economic Development, Tourism, Leisure/Arts.

There will be a reduction of services in the coming year, so while most of the impact of devolution will fall on the larger, town councils, parish councils such as Croscombe will have to monitor the situation to mitigate any impact on the parish, particularly with regard to any need to alter the precept, but also to consider if there are positive ways in which the parish could benefit. This may involve working with other small, neighbouring parishes. Devolution is expected to be a gradual process and will be monitored closely. Discussions on this will begin at the council meeting on 9th January.

Councillor Kate Egan resigned from the Parish Council in late October. Electoral Services Manager (East) of Somerset Council were informed and 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 9th January, 2024, and there will be three candidates for the position.

Appropriate documentation has been received from the Parish Precepts department at Somerset Council concerning the precept for 2024-25. A budget for that year has been developed with a number of precept increase options. This will be discussed at the Council meeting on 9th January. The precept request will be sent to Somerset Council before the deadline, which is now noon on 2nd February, 2024.

The Clerk has begun the Introduction to Local Council Administration (ILCA) course, a self-study, online course, to consolidate and enhance the experience gained in post over the past nine months. This will be completed during January and followed with the corresponding course in finance, the Financial Introduction to Local Council Administration (FILCA). The costs of these course will be shared between the two councils for which the Clerk works.

An internal auditor, Eleanor Greene, has been appointed for 2023-24. The Clerk sent the appropriate letter of engagement and has arranged for the audit to take place on Monday, 8th April, 2024.

There was one interment in Croscombe cemetery since the last council meeting.

Louise Tully has taken over guardianship of the defibrillators. She will review and liaise with the Clerk for the procurement of any spare parts needed.

Following the distribution and collection of a questionnaire around the village, the results of the survey have been analysed by the Council Chairman, Hilary Shergold, and a report produced. Both the questionnaire and report have been posted on the website by the Clerk.

The Clerk liaised with the Communications Lead (Members and Stakeholders) at Somerset Council because of a concern that some communications may not be reaching the Parish Council via the Clerk email account. This was noticed because of the Clerk's work with another council; the email from Bill Revans mentioned above seemed to reach one but not the other. Contact details have been verified with the Communications Lead to ensure all communications will reach Croscombe Parish Council directly. The Clerk's cross-working has ensured that no communication has been missed completely.