



North Petherton Town Council

Town Council Office, Small Hall, North Petherton Community Centre

Fore Street, North Petherton, Somerset, TA6 6QA

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Town Clerk: Miss Joy Norris MSc, ACG

Minutes of the Council meeting held on Monday 17th February 2025 starting on the 19:15hrs in The Small Hall, Fore Street, North Petherton, TA6 6QA

Present

Chair: Councillor P Spencer

Town Councillors: A Bradford, S Habberfield, M P Herbert, L Hyde, K Power S Sharman and J Taylor

In attendance

Cllr B Revans – Somerset Council

Miss J Norris (Town Clerk)

2 members of the public attended the meeting.

22/2025 Chair's Announcements

The Mayor said he had been please to officially open the North Petherton Community Larder and what a good initiative it is.

23/2025 Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Baker, Brown, Dennis and Spelman-Ives.

24/2025 Declarations of Interest

No declarations of interest were made at this stage of the meeting.

25/2025 Community Time

This agenda item provides an opportunity for members of the public to speak on matters on the agenda or relevant to the work of the Council.

Speaker 1

The Speaker asked what is the plan for the youth budget this year as last year there was lots of anti social behaviour on Wilstock and Stockmoor.

The Chair of the Finance and Strategic Development Committee responded that the 25/26 budget for services for young people is approximately £52, 000.

The Deputy Mayor explained that Hestercombe Local Community Network has a current project to find out what young people need and would like - the main method is a survey of young people.

Chair's Initials

Cllr Revans

Cllr Revans reported that progress is being made on the road adoptions on the Wilstock and Stockmoor residential developments and there is now a compliance certificate for the street lighting, other snagging works are underway.

A Traffic Regulation Order (TRO) can only be implemented on non-adopted roads if the developer agrees e.g. there is a in force outside Somerset Bridge school.

Somerset Council has raised road safety issues with the developers of both Wilstock and Stockmoor but as the roads are not yet adopted parking restrictions etc can only be implemented with the developers' consent.

Councillor Revans further reported that the new speed limit signs coming into North Petherton near the Rugby Club need to be illuminated and the developer currently has problems connecting the signs to the electricity supply - negotiations are on-going.

26/2025 Minutes

Consideration was given to the draft minutes of the Council Meeting held on 20 January 2025

RESOLVED to defer consideration of the draft minutes of the Council meeting held on 20 January 2025 until a future meeting to enable Councillors sufficient time to read and assimilate them

27/2025 Consultation – Standards and Conduct

Consideration was given to the Town Council's response to the Governments consultation on strengthening the standards and conduct framework for local authorities in England.

A Working Group comprising Councillors Bradford, Hyde and Taylor had prepared a draft response for consideration.

Issues discussed during consideration of this agenda item included:

- The principle of freedom of speech must not be forgotten
- The role of social media and the press in reporting behaviour and the impact that such reporting has on individuals and the public
- Respect for other is an extremely important principle
- Transparency and openness are vital for any council to function effectively

RESOLVED to submit the responses to the consultation as attached to these Minutes as Appendix 1

28/2025 Invoices for Payment

Consideration was given to invoices received for payment.

Discussion during consideration of this agenda item included:

- That the cost of the play inspections has increased as far more vigorous checks are now been carried out and that is more time consuming for the contractor.

RESOLVED to pay the invoices detailed in the table below:

Chair's Initials

Payee	Invoice Date	Invoice No	Net	VAT	Gross	information
GWB Services	31.1.2025	3057	£3,319.00	£663.80	£3,982.80	As per time sheet: not increased hourly rate
GWB Services	31.1.2025	3058	£100.00	£20.00	£120.00	Weekly play inspections note increased rate
Inspect and Repair	10.2.2025	813	£350.00	£70.00	£420.00	Inspection of Giant swing and zip wire
Greenslades	31.01.2025	9639	£552.93	£110.59	£663.52	Cemetery maintenace
Sue Habberfield	Various		£106.51	£0.00	£106.51	Receipts provided from NP Cubs, Tesco, Sainsburys (items for christmas Hampers)
Youth Unlimited	30.01.2025	314	£7,605.00	£0.00	£7,605.00	May 24 - Jul 24, Aug24 - Oct24, Nov24 - Jan25
Youth Unlimited	30.01.2025	315	£1,800.00	£0.00	£1,800.00	Summer Holiday 24
Wessex Water	02.01.2025		£2.95	£0.00	£2.95	04.12.2024 - 31.01.2025
Total			£13,836.39	£863.59	£14,700.78	
Direct Debit						
BT	05.01.2025	MO34 RG	£56.95	£11.39	£68.34	
EDF	06.02.2025	KI-CO92A314	£45.75	£2.29	£48.04	Toilets
Other						
Unity Trust Bank	30.11.2024		£9.60	£0.00	£9.60	Bank Charges 01.11.2024 - 31.11.2024

The meeting closed at 19:51hrs

Chair's Signature & Date

Agreed Response to the Consultation on Standards and Ethics

1. Are you responding to this consultation as e.g. an elected member, council body etc **Town or Parish Council**
2. Do you think the government should prescribe a mandatory minimum code of conduct for local authorities in England? **Yes**
3. If yes, do you agree there should be scope for local authorities to add to a mandatory minimum code of conduct to reflect specific local challenges?
Yes – it is important that local authorities have flexibility to add to a prescribed code
4. Do you think the government should set out a code of conduct requirement for members to cooperate with investigations into code breaches? **Yes**
5. Does your local authority currently maintain a standards committee? **Yes**
6. Any further comments? **Our Monitoring body is Somerset Council**
7. Should all principal authorities be required to form a standards committee?
Yes
8. In most principal authorities, code of conduct complaints are typically submitted in the first instance to the local authority Monitoring Officer to triage, before referring a case for full investigation. Should all alleged code of conduct breaches which are referred for investigation be heard by the relevant principal authority's standards committee? **Yes, decisions should only be heard by standards committees**
9. Do you agree that the Independent Person and co-opted members should be given voting rights? **Yes – this is important for ensuring objectivity**
10. Should Standards Committees be chaired by the Independent Person? **Yes**
11. If you have further views on ensuring fairness and objectivity and reducing incidences of vexatious complaints, please use the free text box below
Vexatious complaints should be triaged by the Monitoring Officer, the Standards Committee should be informed of the outcome, approve the decision and the matter recorded.
12. Should local authorities be required to publish annually a list of allegations of code of conduct breaches, and any investigation outcomes?
Other views – The community needs to be informed of the number and nature of complaints, allegations and their outcomes. Vexatious and inappropriate

complaints should be treated with sensitivity and protect both complainant and councillor.

13. Should investigations into the conduct of members who stand down before a decision, continue to their conclusion, and the findings be published? **Yes**
14. N/A – question not appropriate for parish council
15. If you currently work, or have worked, within a local authority, have you ever been the victim of (or witnessed) an instance of misconduct by an elected member and felt that you could not come forward? Please give reasons if you feel comfortable doing so. **Several members of our town council have worked for a local authority and have either been personally victimised or had experience of colleagues and staff having these difficulties.**
16. If you are an elected member, have you ever been subject to a code of conduct complaint? If so did you feel you received appropriate support to engage with the investigation? **Some of our members have been subject to vexatious complaints, resulting in serious psychological-based illness.**
17. If you did come forward as a victim or witness, what support did you receive, and from whom? Is there additional support you would have liked to receive?
N/A
18. In your view, what measures would help to ensure that people who are victims of, or witness, serious councillor misconduct feel comfortable coming forward and raising a complaint? **Subjects of complaints must receive full details of accusations as soon as they are received. Councillors must have access to an independent adviser for support and /or counselling.**
19. Do you think local authorities should be given the power to suspend elected members for serious code of conduct breaches? **Yes – authorities should be given the power to suspend members**
20. Do you think that it is appropriate for a standards committee to have the power to suspend members, or should this be the role of an independent body? **Yes – the decision to suspend for serious code of conduct breaches should be for the standards committee.**
Free text - The committee chair (Independent Person) should be selected and appointed by the body overseeing the standards committee, ideally regionally or nationally. The Independent Person must be free of any political or other interests. This person must be seen by the public to be totally impartial.
21. Where it is deemed that suspension is an appropriate response to a code of conduct breach, should local authorities be required to nominate an alternative

point of contact for constituents during their absence? **Yes – councils should be required to ensure that constituents should have an alternative point of contact during a councillor's suspension.**

22. If the government reintroduced the power of suspension, do you think there should be a maximum length of suspension? **Yes – the government should set a maximum length of suspension of 6 months.**

23. If yes, how frequently do you consider councils would be likely to make use of the maximum length of suspension? **Unsure – depending on the circumstances and the personalities involved.**

24. Should local authorities have the power to withhold allowances from suspended councillors in cases where they deem it appropriate? **Yes – councils should have the option to withhold allowances from suspended councillors**

25. Do you think it should be put beyond doubt that local authorities have the power to ban suspended councillors from council premises and to withdraw the use of council facilities in cases where they deem it appropriate? **Yes – premises and facilities bans are an important tool in tackling serious conduct issues**

26. Do you agree that the power to withhold members' allowances and to implement premises and facilities bans should also be standalone sanctions in their own right? **Yes**

27. Do you think the power to suspend councillors on an interim basis pending the outcome of an investigation would be an appropriate measure? **Yes – powers to suspend on an interim basis would be necessary**

28. Do you agree that local authorities should have the power to impose premises and facilities bans on councillors who are suspended on an interim basis? **Yes – the option to institute premises and facilities bans whilst serious misconduct cases are investigated is important**

29. Do you think councils should be able to impose an interim suspension for any period of time they deem fit? **No**

30. Do you agree that an interim suspension should initially be for up to a maximum of 3 months, and then subject to review? **Yes**

31. If following a 3-month review of an interim suspension, a standards committee decided to extend, do you think there should be safeguards to ensure a period

of interim extension is not allowed to run on unchecked? **Yes – there should be safeguards**

32. If you answered yes to above question, what safeguards do you think might be needed to ensure that unlimited suspension is not misused? Free text - **An interim suspension decision must be reviewed within 30 days and then monthly for the a period of 3 months, thereafter 3-monthly.**
33. Do you think councillors should be disqualified if subject to suspension more than once? **No – the power to suspend members whenever they breach code of conduct is sufficient**
34. Is there a case for immediate disqualification for gross misconduct, for example in instances of theft or physical violence impacting the safety of other members and/or officers, provided there has been an investigation of the incident and the member has had a chance to respond before a decision is made? **Yes**
Free text – **The nature of the gross misconduct needs to be clearly defined. It should include emotional, psychological and sexual abuse.**
35. Should members have the right to appeal a decision to suspend them? **Yes – it is right that any member issued with a sanction of suspension can appeal the decision**
36. Should suspended members have to make their appeal within a set timeframe? **Yes – but within a different length of time (from the suggested 5 days) – 14 days**
37. Do you consider that a complainant should have a right of appeal when a decision is taken not to investigate their complaint? **Yes**
38. Do you consider that a complainant should have a right of appeal when an allegation of misconduct is not upheld? **Yes**
39. If you answered yes to either of the previous 2 questions, please use the free text box below to share views on what you think is the most suitable route of appeal for either or both situations.
An appeal should go to the Standards Committee via the Monitoring Officer. This should not preclude a councillor taking independent action against a vexatious complainant.
40. Do you think there is a need for an external national body to hear appeals?
Yes – an external appeals body would help to uphold impartiality

41. If you think there is a need for an external national appeals body, do you think it should: (3 options) **Both of the above should be in scope – ie hear elected member appeals and hear claimant appeals**

Please explain your answer (free text) – **Independent verification is needed to ensure councillors are held to account against any possible infringements of the national Code of Conduct.**

42. In your view would the proposed reforms to the local government standards and conduct framework particularly benefit or disadvantage individuals with protected characteristics, for example those with disabilities or caring responsibilities? **It would benefit individuals with protected characteristics**

Please use the text box below to make any further comments on this question.

Individuals with protected characteristics must be given all appropriate assistance to participate fully in every aspect of the process.